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Claremont McKenna College

(Un)Safe Zones: Good Intentions, Bad Logic

Submitted to
Professor Jennifer Taw

By
Emma E. Henson

For
Senior Thesis
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Mom, Dad, Payton– thank you for listening to me complain endlessly about work and revisions. I appreciate you more than I can put into words. Thank you for pushing and helping and always reminding me that I can achieve the things I set out to. And thank you, perhaps most of all, for never telling me that I shouldn't do something. You have supported me every step of the way and it has made all of the difference in my life. I love you to the moon and back.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the disconnect between calls for safe zones as a tool of humanitarian intervention, and the dark history of safe zone failure. This thesis begins with a brief discussion of current calls for safe zones in Syria, and how a proper theoretical framework and historical understanding are needed to discuss whether or not safe zones can be successfully implemented in Syria. The following literature review discusses not only prominent academic arguments and the history of humanitarian intervention, but it suggests a framework for deconstructing case studies. This framework looks first at the interests of an intervening actor. The level of interest of that actor directly informs its willingness to overcome the challenges of safe zone implementation. The challenges of safe zone implementation are both practical and existential. If an actor's interest in a given crisis is not great enough to make it willing to overcome these practical and existential challenges, or the actor is willing to overcome them but lacks the ability to do so, the safe zone will fail. In most cases of failed safe zones, moral hazard plays a role. Moral hazard can be evident in either the intervening actor's decisions or the decisions of the international community to support or not support the intervention. This thesis then deconstructs three historical cases of safe zones with this method: Srebrenica in Bosnia, Operation Provide Comfort in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Operation Turquoise in Rwanda. Following these three case studies, this paper discusses safe zones in Syria with the help of this method and the broad historical understanding of safe zones established through the case studies. This thesis concludes with a discussion of how the analysis and available historical cases show that safe zones are dangerous tools of humanitarian intervention and should not be undertaken without adequate levels of interest and willingness to address challenges.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	3
<i>Abstract</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Literature Review</i>	12
<i>Case Study: Srebrenica</i>	29
History	29
Analysis	36
<i>Case Study: Operation Provide Comfort, Iraqi Kurdistan</i>	44
History	44
Analysis	50
<i>Case Study: Operation Turquoise, Rwanda</i>	57
History	57
Analysis	66
<i>Case Study: Syrian Civil War</i>	74
History	74
Analysis	90
<i>Conclusion</i>	98
<i>Bibliography</i>	104

Introduction

Since its beginning in 2011, the civil war in Syria has claimed 400,000 lives at a minimum.¹ The conflict is marked by some of the most horrendous images of modern times; cities razed to the ground, refugees braving open oceans to find safety, and citizens murdered by chemical weapons. Even as it seems the war might be coming to an end, the final rebel stronghold at Idlib where an estimated three million civilians have fled stands between Assad and victory.² In September of 2018, Turkish and Russian forces reached an agreement to establish Idlib as a demilitarized zone where “Russian forces... patrol the edge of the rebel-held province while the Turkish army... [operates] in the demilitarized zone.”³ The demilitarized zone and ceasefire in Idlib, however, are beginning to fray as Turkey flounders in achieving its promises of vacating rebel groups from the city. Facing this tenuous situation, with the lives of millions of civilians potentially hanging in the balance, safe zones have come up as a possible solution to the situation.

Throughout the entirety of the conflict, not just in these last few months, discussion of safe zones has been prevalent. During the second presidential debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in October 2016, the moderator asked, “If you were president, what would you do about Syria and the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo?”⁴ Clinton responded, “Well, the situation in Syria is catastrophic... So I, when I was Secretary of State, I advocated and I

¹ Megan Specia, “How Syria’s Death Toll Is Lost in the Fog of War,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/world/middleeast/syria-death-toll.html>.

² Jeremy Bowen, “Sense of an ending for Syria’s war on Idlib front line,” *BBC News*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45796263>.

³ “Turkey and Russia hold joint patrols in Syria’s Idlib,” *Aljazeera*, March 8, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/turkey-russia-hold-joint-patrols-syria-idlib-190308113441646.html>.

⁴ “US Debate: Clinton and Trump Clash Over Syrian War,” *Aljazeera*, October 10, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/debate-clinton-trump-clash-syrian-war-161010093723691.html>

advocate today, a no-fly zone and safe zones.⁵” This seemingly simple and reasonable suggestion contains more complexity and history than is immediately evident in Clinton’s remarks. Safe zones are, in the historical record, one of the most fraught tools of humanitarian intervention available. They are widely-called for and generally accepted as positive by the international community, despite their complicated track record.

Safe zones cannot and should not be discussed outside of a theoretical and historical framework. Discussion of them as a tool is a uniquely visceral subject; there is so much surface appeal, and at a glance, the idea of them is deceptively clear. The thought of safe zones evokes the idea of a light at the end of a tunnel. This notion, however, is false. Layers of tragedy, misuse, and insurmountable complexity shroud the history of safe zones. Never once have safe zones been implemented as effortlessly or beneficially as international leaders appear to suggest. The failure of the UN safe zone at Srebrenica, for example, remains the worst atrocity committed on European soil since the end of WWII. Yet Clinton called for the implementation of safe zones in Syria, and leaders across the globe echoed her suggestion, leaving her with strange bedfellows in this suggested policy.

Senator Marco Rubio penned an article for *Foreign Policy* arguing that “we should also work with our allies, particularly with neighboring states such as Jordan and Turkey, to set up safe zones in border regions of Syria.”⁶ The Turkish government also voiced support for the creation of safe zones in Syria, bolstered by similar comments from the former French President, Francois Hollande, and the UK’s current Foreign Secretary.⁷ Merkel joined the group of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Marco Rubio, “It’s Not Too Late to Save Iraq and Syria,” *Foreign Policy*, August 25, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/25/its-not-too-late-to-save-iraq-and-syria-marco-rubio/>.

⁷ Dion Nissenbaum, Ayla Albayrak, and Nour Malas, “World News: U.S. Sends Mixed Signals on Syria Safe Zone -- Turkey’s Push for Buffer Area for Refugees Along Syrian Border is Backed by France; Americans Offer Varied

individuals in favor of implementing safe zones, vocally supporting the creation of ‘humanitarian harbors’ on the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border.⁸ Robert Gates, Obama’s former Secretary of Defense, even suggested that safe zones were the only tool available to ameliorate the humanitarian disaster created by the civil war.⁹

President Trump has also shown shifting views on the subject. In a 2015 campaign rally, he stated, “in Syria, take a big swatch of land... What I'd like is build a safe zone, it’s here, build a big beautiful safe zone.”¹⁰ He reaffirmed this stance two years later, saying in an interview with NBC that he will, “absolutely do safe zones in Syria for the people.”¹¹ The *Washington Post* leaked an early draft of Executive Order 13769 that included the instruction, “the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of Defense, is directed within 90 days of the date of this order to produce a plan to provide safe areas in Syria.”¹² The stipulation was removed from the final version of the order, however, and over two years into Trump’s presidency, no safe zones have been established.

Trump was not alone in his period of reluctance to implement safe zones in Syria. Two prominent parties also oppose them: former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, and Syrian rebel leaders. In a February 2018 address, Al Hussein warned that “the term ‘de-escalation area’ [was] becoming all too reminiscent of the so-called ‘safe areas’ in

Messages, “*The Wall Street Journal*, October 9, 2014, <https://search-proquest-com.cclidm.oclc.org/docview/1609266925?accountid=10141>.

⁸ Ercan Gurses and Andreas Rinke, “Germany seeking ‘safe zones’ in Syria to shelter refugees,” *Reuters*, April 23, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-turkey-germany-idUSKCN0XK0BS>.

⁹ Kristina Wong, “McCain backs Clinton’s call for a no-fly zone in Syria,” *The Hill*, October 10, 2015, <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/257406-mccain-backs-clintons-call-for-a-no-fly-zone-in-syria>.

¹⁰ Ali Vitali, “Donald Trump: Gove Syrian Refugees ‘Swatch of Land’ for Safe Zone,” *NBC News*, November 16, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/trump-give-syrian-refugees-swatch-land-safe-zone-n464586>.

¹¹ Julia Edwards Ainsley and Matt Spetalnick, “Trump says he will order ‘safe zones’ for Syria,” *Reuters*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-syria-safezones-idUSKBN1592O8>.

¹² “Read the draft of executive order on immigration and refugees,” *The Washington Post*, <https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/read-the-draft-of-the-executive-order-on-immigration-and-refugees/2289/>.

Bosnia.”¹³ Al Hussein’s calls for an end to de-escalation zones are founded in two reasons. The first is the historical precedent of their failure, and the second is their use as a band-aid that allows the international community to channel efforts into addressing a symptom of the conflict, and not its cause.¹⁴ For their part, Syrian rebel leaders rejected a May 2017 Russian plan to implement safe zones on grounds that it was, “a threat to the country’s territorial integrity.”¹⁵

There is a unique and uniquely tangled web of motivations and beliefs that dictate the positions of everyone involved in the question of safe zones in Syria. What scenario could place Hillary Clinton, Vladimir Putin, Marco Rubio, and Angela Merkel together in support of a proposition opposed by a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights? There are many answers to this question, and they lie in the varied motivations for, and complexities of, these widespread calls for safe zones. There is, of course, extensive international desire to offer humanitarian aid to civilians in conflict zones, but countries also have vested interests in calling for safe zones. Additionally, with the implementation of safe zones, there are questions surrounding which actor could create and enforce them, and how it would do so, which inevitably become political questions. Through this politicization, safe zones become even more complicated and nuanced.

The question of safe zones in Syria is ultimately a quagmire. To break down this puzzle in a productive way that could inform a policy recommendation for rendering humanitarian aid in Syria, a method to evaluate case studies of safe zones is necessary. Theoretical material regarding safe zones, humanitarian intervention, and relevant international law on the subject are

¹³ “UN rights chief urges international action as violence soars in Syria,” *United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner*, February 10, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22647>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dmitry Solovyov, “Syrian rebels reject Russia’s proposal for safe zones,” *Reuters*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-safezones-opposition-idUSKBN1801TF>.

not sufficient in informing appropriate courses of action in Syria. This insufficiency is due to the fact that no two historical examples of safe zones are the same; they are not implemented by similar actors, they do not take analogous forms, they are not established during comparable conflicts, they do not face similar problems, and they do not have similar outcomes. In order to properly understand safe zones, and both the problems they face and their historical strengths and downfalls, case studies provide a more effective method than theoretical models and scholarly material alone. This thesis does not seek to define safe zones or compare them exactly to one another, rather it seeks to apply a set method of analysis to four case studies, and ultimately, from this analysis, draw conclusions about the viability of safe zones as a policy tool.

This thesis is divided into three main sections. A literature review follows this introduction, exploring the relevant writing on the subject and establishing a basic understanding of the history of humanitarian intervention and its difficulties. The literature review concludes by proposing a method for analyzing case studies so they can be considered systematically and with a logical progression. The method analyzes the interests of various actors involved in the creation of a specific safe zone. An actor's level of interest directly informs its willingness to overcome the challenges of implementing a safe zone, which are necessarily extensive. Notably, a willingness to execute a safe zone does not inherently mean that the actor has the ability to do so. Moral hazard additionally plays a role in interventions where there is a mismatch between interest, willingness, and practical challenges. This moral hazard can appeal to both the intervening actor and the international community.

Once this method is established, this paper will consider three case studies: Srebrenica in Bosnia, Operation Provide Comfort in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Operation Turquoise in Rwanda. These three cases have been chosen specifically because they represent unique and varied

intersections of interest, will, ability, and outcome. They additionally comprise a broad geographical area and three separate modes of implementation. Peacekeepers implemented the safe area in Bosnia, the U.S. military in concert with a multinational coalition undertook the safe zone in northern Iraq, and France carried out its humanitarian intervention in Rwanda alone. These case studies will be discussed historically, and then analyzed through the established method. Each case study will provide different insights into safe zones and offer unique conclusions regarding the legitimacy and efficacy of safe zones as a tool of humanitarian intervention. Following the exploration of each of these cases, this thesis will consider the case of Syria and the current calls for safe zones in the northwestern part of the country. The conclusions from the other case studies will inform this consideration of the actors involved in the Syrian civil war, their interests, and their will to overcome specific barriers. The chapter will ultimately conclude whether or not safe zones could be successful in Syria.

The lessons learned from these four scenarios will then be extrapolated into a larger discussion regarding the viability of safe zones in future conflict. This discussion will consider the patterns of interest and willingness to overcome obstacles apparent in each of these cases, and how those considerations inform the success or failure of safe zones. The conclusion will ultimately comment on whether or not these inherent relationships between interest and will, and will and success, should inform the continued use of safe zones, or if the cases and evidence explored point to the opposite conclusion.

Literature Review

In *Safety Zones and International Protection: A Dark Grey Area*, Karin Landgren wrote of the 20th century:

It is a truism to note that the waging of war has changed: at the beginning of this century, 90% of war casualties were military; now, 90% are civilians. Following the end of the Cold War, conflicts have been overwhelmingly internal and have often had as their explicit objective the displacement or elimination of rival ethnic or communal groups. The belligerents appear unfamiliar with or not interested in international humanitarian law, and less susceptible to international condemnation. They may see little relevance in the distinction between civilians and combatants.¹⁶

Landgren is plainly asserting that war used to kill soldiers, but now conflict kills civilians. UNICEF suggests that this shift is due to a change in the structure of war; where conflict used to be between two professional armies, now wars are often a, “[grinding struggle] between military and civilians in the same country, or between hostile groups of armed civilians. More and more wars are essentially low-intensity internal conflicts, and they are lasting longer.”¹⁷ It is additionally important to note that the seeds for this shift in the groups that are mainly harmed by war began in the early 20th century. Civilians were harmed en masse during World War One, and World War Two was defined by Nazis indiscriminately targeting Russian and Eastern Europe civilians, in addition to U.S. and allied forces firebombing innocents in Japan and razing Dresden to the ground. Russia also committed widespread, brutal, and systematic rape against German women as a reprisal for Nazi military actions.

The international community has not robustly responded to this shift in the composition of conflict. The international community established the International Criminal Court (ICC) and

¹⁶ Karin Landgren, “Safety Zones and International Protection: A Dark Grey Area,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 7, no. 3 (September 1995): 437.

¹⁷ Ibid.

has pursued a number of war tribunals to uphold the Geneva Conventions, which set out the rights of individuals in wartime. These two moves attempted to prosecute war crimes in hopes of shifting the nature of war back to a system less harmful to innocents in conflict zones.¹⁸

However, the effects of these two institutions have been minimal, as the ICC and war tribunals have limited reach and power. As a result, the international community has chosen to respond to these changes in warfare primarily by declaring humanitarian intervention a duty of the international community and its organizations. In other words, the international community has chosen to institutionalize addressing the symptom of the problem, not its cause.

Brendan Simms and D.J.B. Trim in *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* define humanitarian intervention as, “action by governments (or, more rarely, by organizations) to prevent or to stop governments, organizations, or factions, in a foreign state from violently oppressing, persecuting, or otherwise abusing the human rights of people within that state.”¹⁹ This definition provides an understanding of the basic idea of humanitarian intervention, but it is important to note that the individuals studying, defining, and discussing humanitarian intervention span fields from ethics to war studies. They are additionally trying to explain a phenomenon that can be occasionally difficult to separate from, “coercive diplomacy... armed participation in foreign civil wars, revolts, revolutions, and insurgencies.”²⁰ In defining, discussing, and constraining humanitarian intervention, scholars and politicians alike have struggled with the fact that humanitarian intervention necessarily abrogates national sovereignty and picks sides within a conflict.

¹⁸ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Examples* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 154.

¹⁹ Brendan Simms and D.J.B. Trim, *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

²⁰ Simms, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 2.

As conflict-related humanitarian crises mounted in the 20th century, the international community was faced with a growing need to create an international legal framework to justify and control humanitarian intervention, and it tackled the obstacle of sovereignty first. The Treaty of Westphalia marked the end of the Thirty Years' War and ushered in an international shift from feudal principalities to sovereign states, founding the notion of territorial sovereignty.²¹ This concept is defined as, "the recognition by internal and external actors that the state has the exclusive authority to intervene coercively in activities within its territory."²² Seyom Brown, a prominent scholar on the subject, argues that this unique shift not only led to the creation of nation-states but additionally fostered a sense of 'Westphalian principles' within them.²³ Brown considers Westphalian principles to be the normative core of international law; namely, derived from this notion of inviolable sovereignty, it is largely understood in the international community that countries shall not interfere with each other's domestic affairs.²⁴

The international community hurdled this obstacle by creating international legal justifications for abrogating the sovereignty of states at certain times. Plainly put, "The perpetration of tyranny is not simply an obvious assault on the dignity of persons: it is a betrayal of the very purpose for which the government exists."²⁵ A government surrenders its right to sovereignty when it fails to fulfill, or chooses not to fulfill, its most basic responsibility of protecting the citizens who live under it. After creating this legal argument to justify

²¹ Jason Farr, "The Westphalia Legacy and the Modern Nation-State," *International Social Science Review* 80, no. 3/4 (2005): 156, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41887235>.

²² Janice E. Thomson, "State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Empirical Research," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (June 1995): 219, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2600847.pdf>

²³ Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalia Myth," *International Organization*, 55, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 261, <https://doi.org/10.1162/00208180151140577>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Fernando R. Téson, "The Ethics of Humanitarian Intervention," in *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas*, ed. J.L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 96.

humanitarian intervention, the international community set about adopting a series of norms to govern the actualization of it. In *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas*, Fernando Téson argues that humanitarian intervention is only legitimate when it follows certain principles. Those principles include, “proportional... use... of military force, undertaken in principle by a liberal government or alliance, aimed at ending tyranny or anarchy, [and] welcomed by the victims.”²⁶

However, the fact remained that the international community did not require organizations or individual actors to intervene in humanitarian crises. Rather, it had created a complex framework to justify intervention in the face of certain atrocities. Faced with an increasing number of unaddressed humanitarian crises at odds with the robust international and academic framework for humanitarian intervention, the UN created the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). R2P was originally suggested in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), a commission populated mainly by countries from the UN General Assembly.²⁷ R2P declares that upholding the rights the international community has granted to individuals constitutes a *duty* for international organizations and independent actors.²⁸ Essentially, the international community created R2P as an attempt to institutionalize the requirement of intervention in qualifying humanitarian crises.

The UN made a concerted effort to increase intervention in the years following the adoption of R2P, including the implementation of a peacekeeping mission in Darfur to address the genocide.²⁹ However, the UN did not respond to any number of other humanitarian crises (an

²⁶ Téson, “Ethics,” 94.

²⁷ Todd Burkhardt, *Just War and Human Rights: Fighting with Right Intention* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2017), 87.

²⁸ Burkhardt, *Just War*, 8.

²⁹ “The Dilemma of Humanitarian Intervention,” Council on Foreign Relations, last modified June 12, 2013, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/dilemma-humanitarian-intervention>.

action commonly referred to as nonintervention) ranging from a devastating cyclone in Burma in 2008 to Desmond Tutu's call for a nonmilitary intervention in Zimbabwe.³⁰ R2P additionally provided France with appropriate justification to become involved in conflicts in Mali, which, at best, was problematic given France's position as Mali's former colonizer.³¹ Noting French involvement in Mali is important because it shows how, not only was R2P not fully actualized, but it even gave actors a cover to pursue advantageous policy options that may otherwise have been viewed unfavorably by the international community.

Additionally, a number of UN interventions that were undertaken in good faith proved less than successful.³² For example, in 2011, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1973 to address the deteriorating situation in Libya. The Resolution called for an immediate ceasefire and permitted the use of 'all means necessary' to protect citizens.³³ A coalition led by NATO began a military intervention in mid-March that lasted until Gaddafi's death in October. Following the end of the fighting, the UN established the United Nations Support Mission in Libya to help the transitional government, but reconstruction efforts have proven largely unsuccessful. The UN-backed Government of National Accord is only one of the many factions vying for control in the country. The situation has devolved into a conflict between numerous armed groups and terrorist organizations, and there is no appreciable central governmental authority in the nation. Despite UN attempts to broker agreements between groups,

³⁰ Charles Homans, "Responsibility to Protect: A Short History," *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/responsibility-to-protect-a-short-history/>.

³¹ Peter Beaumont, "Yes, the UN has a duty to intervene. But when, where and how?" *The Guardian*, May 4, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/04/un-syria-duty-to-intervene>.

³² Tom Esslemont, "As Syrian deaths mount, world's 'responsibility to protect' takes a hit: experts," *Reuters*, October 24, 2016 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-law/as-syrian-deaths-mount-worlds-responsibility-to-protect-takes-a-hit-experts-idUSKCN12O2S3>.

³³ Richard Roth, "U.N. Security Council approves no-fly zone in Libya," *CNN*, March 18, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/03/17/libya.civil.war/index.html?hpt=T2>.

Libya is now widely regarded as a failed state.³⁴ When faced with the understanding that successfully installing and protecting the Government of the National Accord would require huge amounts of sustained effort, the UN faded out of the picture. While R2P succeeded in getting the UN to the table, it did not ultimately play a large role in helping the people of Libya achieve peace. In the wake of this failure of R2P, the UN chose, and has continued to choose, to remain largely on the sidelines in Syria. The main lesson learned from the application of R2P in Libya was that, in order to play a substantive role in the resolution of a war, the UN needed to commit much more than marginal involvement. If individual actors and international organizations had previously not become involved in conflicts because they were unwilling to expend the effort and resources to do so, R2P did little to address or mitigate those barriers. The reasons international organizations and actors were not intervening to address human rights abuses were not solved by R2P. Rather, nonintervention was due to practical factors that R2P did not address.

These problems inherent to R2P made it clear that states and other actors do not undertake humanitarian intervention lightly. Before R2P, there was a sense that the international community had not tried hard enough to police humanitarian crises. However, waning enthusiasm for R2P is tied to the growing international realization that humanitarian intervention is difficult, an acknowledgment supported by its mixed track record. This international wariness is seen in the reluctance of countries and organizations to intervene for humanitarian purposes in Venezuela, Myanmar, and Syria, to pick three examples. However, little of this newfound skepticism and reluctance has extended to safe zones. Safe zones are often viewed as separate

³⁴ Zineb Abdessadok, "Libya Today: From Arab Spring to failed state," *Aljazeera*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/happening-libya-today-170418083223563.html>.

from humanitarian intervention, and therefore not plagued by the systemic problems associated with humanitarian intervention. However, the reality could not be more different. Safe zones are a form of humanitarian intervention, not separate from it, and are tied up in the same complexities and difficulties as other forms of humanitarian intervention. Namely, safe zones are constrained by the same narrow international legal definition as humanitarian intervention, and they are often implemented by actors who do not fully realize the effort and resources required to undertake them successfully. It is ultimately illogical for the international community to be reluctant to pursue humanitarian intervention and not also be reluctant to implement safe zones.

The reasons for these problems with humanitarian intervention can be explained on a theoretical level by an argument put forth by Edward Luttwak in *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*. While his argument is extensive, the main idea is that the systems of logic employed during peacetime and during war are not only different but are complete inverses of each other. For instance, “an advancing force can choose between two roads, one good and one bad, the first broad, direct, and well-paved, the second narrow, circuitous, and unpaved. Only in the paradoxical realm of strategy would the choice arise at all, because it is only in war that a bad road can be good *precisely because it is bad* and may therefore be less strongly defended or even left unguarded by the enemy.”³⁵ He extrapolates this argument to discuss the paradoxical problems of humanitarian intervention, a notion that sounds so positive and reasonable but is rarely successful. Luttwak begins by noting that the largest motivation of an intervening body is to avoid casualties to its own forces.³⁶ This is logical; in a war zone, the main motivation is often to simply survive. The disconnect with humanitarian intervention is that the practice is a self-

³⁵ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

³⁶ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 61.

imposed war to protect a third party. The knee-jerk reaction of self-preservation made by a third-party soldier is to herself, and maybe her comrades. Her reaction to danger likely does not accommodate protecting a group of individuals who are not her countrymen. An internal UN review released in 2015 even, “found that UN peacekeeping missions routinely avoid using force to protect civilians who are under attack, intervening in only 20 percent of cases despite being authorized to do so by the UN Security Council.”³⁷

Luttwak argues that, despite this deep disconnect between the third-party intervenor and the group that needs protecting, the intervening force can pursue its own self-interest and still have a positive effect on the situation. The inclination of UN a peacekeeping force (Luttwak’s chosen example of an intervening actor) is generally to side with local belligerents, keeping the peace (in a relative sense) and protecting itself. Luttwak says that, in this scenario of backing the stronger local belligerent, “the result could be conducive to peace. For in that case, the UN presence would actually enhance the peacemaking potential of war, by helping the strong to defeat the weak that much faster and more decisively.”³⁸

A discussion of the morality of Luttwak’s argument falls outside of the scope of this paper, but the structure of his logic is applicable when considering the motivations of actors pursuing humanitarian intervention. Luttwak’s suggestion sounds jarring, but it is logical; a third-party cannot really be expected to put itself in harm’s way, but it can still play a role in minimizing the amount of time spent in war, therefore minimizing casualties. The problems lie in the fact that, while an intervening force wants to mitigate harm to itself, it is likely to be unwilling to take the extreme measures Luttwak suggests. The UN wants to save lives while

³⁷ Barney Henderson, “What have been the successes and failures of UN peacekeeping missions?” *The Telegraph*, September 28, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/bosnia/11729436/Srebrenica-20-years-on-What-have-been-the-successes-and-failures-of-UN-peacekeeping-missions.html>.

³⁸ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 61.

remaining a neutral force; it wants to protect the vulnerable population without putting its forces in a dangerous position, but it also wants to stay away from strong belligerents, or at least not actively support their goals. The main effect of this situation is that, “at best... forces remain the passive spectators of violence and outright massacres.”³⁹

Safe zones are areas of civility, so their creation and administration is often defined by the linear logic of peace. However, safe zones are necessarily erected in areas of conflict where the logic of war pervades. It is from this disconnect that major problems arise. Luttwak does note that intervention can still be justified, even if the international community cannot stomach the idea of supporting one side to quickly end a war, but only if the intervention tangibly protects civilians, “from the effects of the wars they are prolonging.”⁴⁰ Derived from Luttwak’s theory of competing systems of logic, this chapter deconstructs the interests of actors intervening for humanitarian purposes, and how the level of an actor’s interest informs its will and ability to overcome challenges.

The reality of humanitarian intervention is that it is complex, costly, and difficult to implement. Because of these large hurdles, countries and organizations tend to only intervene when it serves them in some way. When discussing the case of nonintervention in Darfur, where the UN estimated 300,000 people were killed,⁴¹ Nick Grono wrote, “the sad reality is that Darfur simply does not matter enough, and Sudan matters too much for the international community to do more to stop the atrocities.”⁴² An entity will not spend resources and time and risk a possible negative outcome that could involve harm to its own forces if intervention does not somehow

³⁹ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 62.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “UN: 460,000 displaced in Darfur this year,” *Aljazeera*, November 14, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/11/un-displaced-violence-darfur-20131114132610566629.html>.

⁴² Nick Grono, “Briefing- Darfur: The International Community’s Failure to Protect,” *African Affairs* 105, no. 421: 628. doi:10.1093/afraf/adl036.

align with its interests as a nation or an organization. A. Krieg, in *Motivations for Humanitarian Intervention*, explains this phenomenon as an, “assumption deriving from realism that states in the international arena should and do base their actions on self-interest or, in a broader sense, national interests.”⁴³ This conception of self-interest does not inherently mean that a nation cannot intervene in a positive way, or that the self-interest of one nation would not align with the interests of a group within a conflict. However, the international legal structures for humanitarian intervention have also created a system that allows for ‘power plays’ poorly disguised as humanitarian intervention.⁴⁴ Humanitarian intervention, including safe zones, allows a country to intervene in the affairs of other nations and pursue goals, whether helpful or harmful, while being protected by a system that justifies and vindicates its actions. Edward Luttwak described this situation through the lens of UN intervention, as, “[satisfying] interventionist urges mandated by member states, or even motivated by their own institutional ambitions.”⁴⁵ The legal and social structures that normalized humanitarian intervention in response to increasing civilian death in war zones were predicated legitimately on the belief that, “states should not be able to commit mass murder by hiding behind national sovereignty.”⁴⁶ This sentiment paradoxically lays the foundation for an actor to abrogate the sovereignty of a nation to further its own goals. If a country is entering a conflict for reasons of self-interest, the country is likely to greatly complicate the conflict and skew toward actions fulfilling self-interest over legitimate humanitarian actions.

⁴³ Andreas Krieg, *Motivations for Humanitarian Intervention: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 37.

⁴⁴ Krieg, *Motivations*, 38.

⁴⁵ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 62.

⁴⁶ “Problems and Prospects for Humanitarian Intervention,” The Stanley Foundation, last modified 2000, <https://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/archive/UNND00pb.pdf>.

Additionally, rendering aid to a group may involve complex considerations of how best to gather individuals, when some may be reluctant. In *Just and Unjust Wars*, Michael Walzer considers the three main reasons individuals would be reluctant to enter a zone of safety established by a third party. He identifies these to be, “[a] hope to welcome the enemy and profit from his victory, and from those who are unwilling to ‘desert’ the patriotic cause... [or] the unwillingness to leave one’s home to separate from one’s friends and family, to become a refugee.”⁴⁷ This chapter suggests the additional motivation, particularly during humanitarian crises, that some individuals would choose to flee the area or nation altogether, rather than enter a safe zone within its borders. Creating a safe zone that includes all of the vulnerable individuals belonging to a specific group would mean removing the agency of precisely those individuals who wished to flee or wished to stay where they were. While Article 78 of the Fourth Geneva Convention grants an actor the power to, “[if considered necessary] for reasons imperative to security, [or] to take safety measures concerning protected persons, it may, at the most, subject them to assigned residence or to internment.”⁴⁸ Notably, the words ‘considered necessary’ are problematic in this article as they are open to interpretation.

An uncharitable view of this problem, offered by Edward Luttwak, is that safe zones, “inhibit the normal remedy of endangered citizens, which is to escape from the combat zone.”⁴⁹ A stance that better balances Luttwak’s opposition and the possible positive aspects of constraining unwilling populations is that, while removing agency from noncombatants leaves them vulnerable to abuse, fleeing can also be highly dangerous. There may also be legitimate

⁴⁷ Walzer, *Just*, 165.

⁴⁸ “Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War,” International Committee of the Red Cross, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/385ec082b509e76c41256739003e636d/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5>.

⁴⁹ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 62.

situations in which moving all individuals to one place allows an actor to more effectively protect civilians and render aid.

The doctrine of double effect can be useful in considering situations where removing the agency of individuals is justified. Double effect requires that “the act is good in itself or at least indifferent; the direct effect is morally acceptable; the intention of the actor is good; and the good effect is sufficiently good to compensate for allowing the evil effect.”⁵⁰ While this framework is generally applied to the killing of noncombatants in war zones, the proposition of double effect is a better framework than Article 78 for considering when the removal of agency from individuals in war zones is justified.

Ultimately, even if the intentions of the actor are genuinely good, the actual process of intervening can be problematic. The interests of an actor inform its willingness to overcome the problems of intervention. The greater the interests of an actor in a given conflict, the larger its will to overcome the challenges it will inevitably face in establishing a safe zone. Perhaps one of the largest obstacles safe zones pose is that they cannot be implemented according to the international legal standards of what constitutes legitimate humanitarian intervention. In *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict*, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse argued that legitimate humanitarian intervention must involve humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and universality.⁵¹ Essentially, humanitarian intervention must seek to increase the welfare of human beings, aim to relieve the suffering of individuals regardless of identity, aid individuals without taking a side in the conflict, and support universal common values.⁵²

⁵⁰ Walzer, *Just*, 153.

⁵¹ Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict: A Reconceptualization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*

At the heart of their argument are the ideas of impartiality and neutrality. Woodhouse and Ramsbotham described impartiality as “[making] no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions,”⁵³ and neutrality as, “not [taking] sides in hostilities or [engaging] at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature.”⁵⁴ These two notions sound similar but have important differences. Doctors Without Borders explains impartiality as not discriminating based on the identity of an individual, meaning rendering services to all individuals in conflict zones.⁵⁵ Doctors Without Borders additionally explains neutrality as not taking sides in a larger conflict.⁵⁶ In this sense, impartiality can be conceived of as a tenet on an individual level, and neutrality is a systemic notion. While these ideals may sound reasonable, they stand in complete opposition to the reality of humanitarian intervention. It is virtually impossible to intervene in a truly impartial and neutral manner. Intervention in a humanitarian crisis inherently requires taking a side. Otherwise an intervention would have no effect on the conflict and offer no reprieve from violence for civilians.

This situation is particularly clear with safe zones. An intervening actor has to enter a conflict, create an area of safety protecting a certain group, and physically defend it. Karl von Clausewitz famously defined the mechanism of war as: “each of the adversaries [forcing] the hand of the other... [resulting in] a reciprocal action.”⁵⁷ Invading a country and creating a safe zone is forcing the belligerents’ hands; a reciprocal action should be expected. This is the seed of many problems with safe zones. International organizations and other actors attempt to remain neutral and impartial to avoid looking like they are having an effect on the larger conflict, but the

⁵³ Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, *Intervention*, 16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Carol Devine, “Neutrality vs. Impartiality: What’s the difference?” *Doctors Without Borders*, March, 11, 2018, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.ca/article/neutrality-vs-impartiality-what%E2%80%99s-difference>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Walzer, *Just*, 23.

fact of the matter is that they are, and they do. Luttwak described this phenomenon: “[The] common, inherent characteristic is that [the intervenor inserts] themselves in war situations while refusing to engage in combat.”⁵⁸ While every intervening actor becomes involved in a humanitarian crisis because it has some interest in the conflict, an actor is very unlikely to have levels of interest that justify risking the lives of its service members for a third-party. In order for the interests of an actor to create a willingness to accept the possible imperilment of its forces, its interests likely have to be related to national security interest or some form of vital economic interest. A third-party humanitarian disaster would have to be very specific to fulfill those requirements, and very rarely are those requirements evident in a conflict where an actor is undertaking humanitarian intervention. Therefore, the actors generally intervening in humanitarian crises do not have adequate interests in the situation to create the willingness to overcome the practical challenge of danger. It is from this disconnect that many of the problems and shortcomings of safe zones as a tool of humanitarian intervention arise.

There are additional practical considerations. While the interest of an actor informs its will to overcome some of these practical considerations, there is another step between willingness and execution. Great enough interests create willingness to overcome practical challenges, but the actor must have the ability to do so. If the will of an actor is commensurate with the effort needed to overcome the practical challenges of safe zone implementation, and it has the military, political, and economic ability to do so, then the operation can be successful. However, these practical challenges can be great, and even an actor with large enough interests and a high level of willingness may still lack the ability in material or political terms to overcome these practical challenges. Conor Foley, author of *The Thin Blue Line: How*

⁵⁸ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 61.

Humanitarianism Went to War, said in an interview that, “humanitarian interventions virtually never resolve humanitarian crises... and the attempt to portray humanitarian interventions as a panacea is damaging because it is just not true that they work. Over the last twenty years, there are very few that have worked.”⁵⁹

Foley argues that humanitarian intervention can only be successful under narrow circumstances, namely when an intervention is, “supported by the U.N. Security Council... properly financed, [has] proper goals, and those where interveners understand their mandate.”⁶⁰ The common denominator of these factors is a high level of resources, organization, and clarity. These factors can only be fulfilled by a deeply committed actor with an array of resources including, but not limited to, funds, armaments, and personnel. Furthermore, even in situations where the intervening actor is fully aware of these considerations and willing to fund an intervention, it may be materially unable to overcome some of the practical challenges of the project. How can an actor protect a group that is far away, or dispersed across a wide terrain? How can an actor protect a group in difficult terrain? If one group is being protected from another, how can the actor distinguish between the groups? When does an actor intervene? How does an actor coordinate between agencies and groups? How does an actor gauge the levels of weaponry needed for a specific context? Does the actor need air power as well as ground troops? Where does the actor put the safe zone? Should the location be easily accessible for individuals fleeing the conflict, or somewhere more strategically located for defensive purposes, should the need arise? How can an actor ensure stability in the area after it leaves? The questions governing these practical aspects continue on and on. They are all questions that can be answered and

⁵⁹ “How Humanitarian Intervention Failed the World,” *Foreign Policy*, November 1, 2008, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2008/11/01/how-humanitarian-intervention-failed-the-world/>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

planned for in most scenarios given proper time, resources, and manpower. The reality remains whether or not countries and organizations can ever have adequate interests to create a level of willingness which, coupled with the material resources of the actor, can overcome these hurdles and have a chance at proving successful.

If the interests of an actor are not large enough to create an appropriate level of will, there is a moral hazard problem with intervention. The current system of humanitarian intervention creates a moral hazard for the international community. Intervening in conflicts removes the need for the international community to pursue, implement, and oversee peace plans or military actions that actually address the conflict. Instead of undertaking that difficult work, international organizations and individual actors have a built-in ‘easy way out’ option. They can pursue humanitarian intervention to ‘address’ the problem, or at least appear to be addressing the problem to the international community. While humanitarian intervention does not create a moral hazard for actors in a vacuum, it does more often than not in the reality of the international system. As established above, the likelihood that any given actor has interests large enough to make it willing to utilize the full power of its political and military ability for intervention is very low. The system is such, however, that actors are not mandated or even necessarily expected to fulfill those basic requirements before intervening in a conflict. Therefore, an actor has an incentive to intervene half-heartedly in a conflict rather than pursue an arduous diplomatic process or a bald military intervention. Additionally, Luttwak explains that “war may be a great evil, but it does have great virtue. By consuming and destroying the material and moral resources needed to keep fighting, war prevents its own continuation.”⁶¹ Essentially, only a war that has ended after burning out the resources needed to wage war can lead to a sustainable

⁶¹ Luttwak, *Strategy* 37.

peace.⁶² He goes on to argue that, “Since 1945, wars among lesser powers have rarely been allowed to follow their natural course. Instead, they have typically been interrupted.”⁶³ The interruptions of humanitarian intervention prolong the conflict and allow the belligerent pockets of time without fighting when it can regroup, reposition, and retrain.⁶⁴ Intervening for humanitarian purposes without having appropriate interest, willingness, and ability creates a dangerous situation for the group in need of protection. Despite this fact, the international community upholds a system where half-cocked humanitarian intervention fills the same ceremonial role of ‘involvement’ that undertaking actual, tangible steps toward solving the conflict would. Ultimately, safe zones and humanitarian intervention are mired in extensive obstacles. While the international community has begun to slowly recognize this in relation to humanitarian intervention, the same hesitance has not yet been extended to safe zones.

This thesis will analyze the case studies through the lens of the interests of the actors. Once the interest of each actor is established, this analysis will consider how that interest informs the willingness of the actor to overcome the practical challenges safe zones posed in each case study. The chapter will then discuss how the interests and willingness of the actor informed its ability to undertake the project. Ultimately, the analysis will consider how moral hazard played a role in each scenario, and how a consideration of interest, will, ability, and moral hazard for each case study informs the success or failure of the safe zone.

⁶² Luttwak, *Strategy* 59.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Case Study: Srebrenica

History

Srebrenica is a small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina; despite its small population, lack of industry, and mountainous terrain, the city was the location of the largest act of genocide to occur on European soil since the end of WWII. In the summer of 1995, the Bosnian Serb army murdered roughly 8,000 Muslim Bosnians in a UN safe zone under the protection of a battalion of Dutch peacekeepers working in concert with NATO air forces.⁶⁵

The historical context for the genocide at Srebrenica is complex; the conflict in Bosnia was a subset of a convoluted civil war in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was originally established after World War One by merging areas of the former Austro-Hungarian empire with the Kingdom of Serbia, resulting in an ethnically and religiously diverse nation.⁶⁶ Following World War Two, Yugoslavia formed a communist government led by Josip Tito. The country was comprised of six territories: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia (which also included two independent territories, Kosovo and Vojvodina), and Slovenia. Yugoslavia's ethnic groups included, but were not limited to, Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Slavic Muslims.⁶⁷ Yugoslavia was comprised of six administrative units; each territory represented the strongest concentration of each ethnicity. Serbs lived predominantly in Serbia, Croats lived predominantly in Croatia, and so on. The exception to this was Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had fairly equal populations of Eastern Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Slavs (commonly referred to as Bosniaks), and a large minority of Catholic Croats. It is

⁶⁵ Jan Willem Honig and Norbert Both, *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), xix.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict: Application of a Process Model," Rand, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1188/MR1188.annex1.pdf.

important to note that no single ethnic group comprised a majority in Bosnia.⁶⁸

Tito's death in 1980 marked the end of a rule that had suppressed ethnic tensions through promoting brotherhood and unity and oppressing dissent. Tito's death was followed by an economic crisis and the beginning of the fall of communism.⁶⁹ These changes led to an increase in ethnic nationalism across the territories, coinciding with the 1986 appointment of Slobodan Milošević as the head of the ruling communist party in Serbia.⁷⁰ Milošević and his supporters overthrew state governments in Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, and Kosovo, instating leaders who aligned with their ideals. He began calling for the unity and centralization of Yugoslavia under a mainly Serb government, which was opposed by Slovenia, Macedonia, and Croatia, who wished for the territories and their predominant ethnic groups to gain greater independence.⁷¹ Croatia eventually declared independence from Yugoslavia, and this move increased tensions with Serbia because Croatia had a large minority of Serbs.⁷² Slovenia then declared independence, and with violence between Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia mounting, the international community tried and failed to reach a peace deal. The conflict became centered around that fact that Milošević had become the de facto leader of Yugoslavia, and the other ethnic groups in their respective territories wished to leave Yugoslavia and its Serb-dominated rule. Milošević opposed the disintegration of Yugoslavia by supporting rebelling Serb minorities in other territories.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Balkans War: A Brief Guide," *BBC News*, March 18, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17632399>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

This ethnic violence eventually spread to Bosnia. Bosnians, primarily Bosniaks, voted for independence in a referendum denounced by Bosnian Serb leaders and boycotted by most Bosnian Serbs.⁷³ Following this vote, Serbs in Bosnia declared their own independent republic, and Milošević sent Serbs from the Yugoslav Army to serve in the Bosnian Serb army.⁷⁴ The army began seizing Serb-majority areas within Bosnia and launching mortar attacks on Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. The international community started closely monitoring the situation in Bosnia, in addition to the larger conflict in Yugoslavia. The UN established a peacekeeping force in Bosnia in February of 1992. In the early days, the UN tasked this peacekeeping force, UNPROFOR, with stabilizing Sarajevo, namely through protecting the functions of its airport.⁷⁵ Two months later in April, the Serbs began a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Bosniaks in north and east Bosnia. In August, the UN discovered the existence of a Serb-run concentration camp in Omarska.⁷⁶ In September of 1992, the UN envoy to Bosnia reported to the UN Human Rights Commission that Serbs were responsible for most of the crimes in Bosnia, and the UN expanded the mandate of UNPROFOR to include protecting humanitarian relief convoys.

Violence further increased in the following year as Serb forces dominated the Bosniak army, and in May of 1993, the Security Council was faced with the inevitable fall of a Bosniak stronghold at Srebrenica. In *Humanitarian Intervention and Safety Zones: Iraq, Bosnia, and Rwanda*, Carol McQueen described the situation as, “the town was entirely surrounded and under siege with Serbs blocking access to the humanitarian convoys aiming to deliver food to its now swollen population of 60,000.”⁷⁷ General Philippe Morillon, the commander of

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Carol McQueen, *Humanitarian Intervention and Safety Zones: Iraq, Bosnia, and Rwanda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 58.

UNPROFOR forces in Bosnia, went to Srebrenica without the permission of his superiors; once there, he hoisted a UN flag and announced that Srebrenica was under the protection of the United Nations.⁷⁸ Morillon thought his words would be a temporary promise to the civilians in Srebrenica, believing that a peace plan would soon be reached. Mounting pressure on Srebrenica by Bosnian Serbs, however, forced the Security Council's hand. Resolution 819, passed the Security Council in May 1993, officially established Srebrenica as a safe zone.⁷⁹ The UNPROFOR peacekeepers tasked with protecting Srebrenica were from a battalion of Dutch soldiers often referred to as Dutchbat.

Over the following months, the UN executed a plan to establish Srebrenica as a safe zone. According to the resolution, Srebrenica and its surrounding area were to be, "free from any armed attack or any other hostile attack," and while this objective was clear, UNPROFOR's expanded mandate was not.⁸⁰ Peacekeepers and their commanders were unsure if their job was only to deter Serb forces, or, as the mandate also suggested, to, "[act] in self-defense, to take the necessary measures, including the use of force, in reply to bombardments against safe areas."⁸¹ Responding to the bombardment of the safe area and deterring the Serb force were not necessarily complementary actions; the former made UNPROFOR wary of escalating the conflict. Additionally, UNPROFOR superiors maintained that "the execution of the mandate was secondary to the security of UN personnel," giving Dutchbat soldiers a catch-all excuse for selectively executing their convoluted and contradictory mandate.⁸² The mandate also authorized

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ McQueen, *Intervention*, 52.

⁸⁰ Honig and Both, Srebrenica, 5.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 8.

the use of, “air power in and around the safe areas,” which, in the case of UNPROFOR, meant NATO air assistance.⁸³

In late spring of the same year, France delivered a report to the Security Council which suggested two options that would, “suffice to cover — sanctuarize— the areas.”⁸⁴ In order to protect the tens of thousands of Bosniaks who had taken shelter from the Bosnian Serb army at Srebrenica, the UN needed to undertake serious measures. The light option suggested by the French involved 10,000 soldiers.⁸⁵ The heavy option, the only one the French report found likely to “oppose aggression” against the UN safe area, called for 45,000 troops.⁸⁶ The suggested criteria for the involvement of airpower in all of these cases was in response to, “shelling of the safe areas, armed incursion into the safe areas, and impeding the free movement of UNPROFOR.”⁸⁷ However, even as years passed after this 1993 proclamation, the suggestions remained unimplemented. McQueen boils the reason for this inaction down to the fact that “there never was any intention to defend the safe areas through deployment of ground troops.”⁸⁸

Srebrenica was additionally, “difficult to defend. Although the terrain was extremely hilly and densely forested, the enclave itself was relatively small... [it was] located in [a] valley that could be overlooked from the surrounding hills... in direct view of Serb artillery positions.”⁸⁹ Dutchbat had two bases and thirteen observation posts (OPs) protecting a fifty-kilometer perimeter in Srebrenica and its neighboring town of Potočari.⁹⁰ However, by 1995, the year the massacre at Srebrenica would take place, Dutchbat only had 429 men, and only half of

⁸³ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 6.

⁸⁴ McQueen, *Intervention*, 72.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ McQueen, *Intervention*, 74.

⁸⁹ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

them were infantry soldiers.⁹¹ The issue of who exactly was being protected in the enclave compounded this problem with troop numbers. While the safe zone was intended only for civilian Bosniaks fleeing the Serb advance, “there were thousands of armed Muslims based in the safe area.”⁹²

The situation was growing increasingly tenuous for Dutchbat as, “the ceasefire was regularly violated by both sides, and shipments of humanitarian supplies... were habitually obstructed by the Serbs. Given the inconsistent mandate and limited strength, the Dutch felt they could... do little more than watch, count, log, and report violations.”⁹³ The final Serb attack on Srebrenica began on July 6, 1995. The Serbs shelled vulnerable OPs, most of which were positioned in the valley for the sole purpose of observation and were poorly located for tactical conflict.⁹⁴ The Commander of Dutchbat, Lieutenant Colonel Karremans, was tasked with choosing between three available options: returning Serb fire in an act of self-defense warranted by UNPROFOR’s mandate, which would risk retaliation from the superiorly manned Serb forces; requesting air support from NATO with the possibility that such actions would greatly escalate the conflict; and pursuing a de-escalation of the situation through diplomacy.⁹⁵ Karremans opted for diplomacy, though repeated attempts to reach out to the Serb forces were unsuccessful.

Conditions deteriorated further over the following days. The Serb army continued provocative attacks around Srebrenica. Lieutenant-General Janvier, acting UNPROFOR commander in Bosnia, refused several requests for air support, believing that the Serb forces

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 6.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 7.

⁹⁵ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 8.

were not serious about taking the enclave.⁹⁶ He additionally feared that mounting an air attack would only escalate the conflict.⁹⁷ Dutchbat forces on the ground were outgunned and outmanned by the Serb forces, and additionally, “believed that they could not be expected to put up any meaningful defense of the enclave.”⁹⁸ Even if Karremans could convince Janvier to secure close air support from NATO, such an attack could trigger the use of artillery and mortars by the Serb forces, endangering Dutchbat and Srebrenica unless all or most Serb weapon systems could be eliminated in the air raid.⁹⁹

The Serb army continued to capture vulnerable OPs, and additionally took a number of Dutchbat soldiers hostage.¹⁰⁰ On the day of July 11, 1995, it became undeniable that the Serb objective was to capture Srebrenica, and that Dutchbat was simultaneously incapable of mounting an effective counterattack and also largely unwilling to do so. UN officials and NATO entities eventually approved calls from Dutchbat requesting airstrikes on roughly forty targets.¹⁰¹ However, after only a number of the forty targets were destroyed, the Serb army issued a return ultimatum that, “if the air attacks were not stopped forthwith, they would kill captured Dutch soldiers and shell the refugees and Dutchbat indiscriminately.”¹⁰² The Dutch defense minister called for an immediate stop to the bombardment. That afternoon, when Karremans began negotiations with the Serbs, there were roughly 25,000 Bosniaks in and around the Dutch compounds.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ McQueen, *Intervention*, 80.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 12.

⁹⁹ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ McQueen, *Intervention*, 80.

¹⁰¹ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 25.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 27.

Though ‘negotiations’ lasted a number of days, and Dutchbat did not leave Srebrenica until July 21st, the Serb army faced few barriers in executing their plan of ethnic cleansing. The Serbs had begun quietly deporting Bosniaks almost immediately after Srebrenica fell. The UN and the Dutch government reached an agreement with the Serb army that Dutchbat should ‘monitor the evacuation of the refugees,’ which, in practice, meant that Dutch soldiers were to help separate the women and children from the men.¹⁰⁴ At that point, any option to also save the Bosniaks was lost. The compound had already been overrun.

The Serbs murdered the Bosniak men and boys; in all, roughly 8,000 Bosniaks were killed in a blatant act of genocide at Srebrenica.¹⁰⁵ Years later at the Hague, Fouad Riad, a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia said, “These are truly scenes from hell, written on the darkest pages of human history.”¹⁰⁶

Analysis

The tragedy at Srebrenica was, at every point until the end, completely avoidable. The negligent decisions of the international community, particularly the members of the Security Council and the Dutch government, allowed the massacre to occur. After years of watching the chaos in Yugoslavia unfold as widespread ethnic violence took root in Bosnia, the international community entered the conflict slowly and without much of a plan. The establishment of UNPROFOR itself is a testament to this; it was originally tasked with protecting a single airport in a region plagued by conflict. The UN did not have much of an interest in the conflict outside of a genuine concern for the loss of human life.

¹⁰⁴ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ Ivo. H Daalder, “Decision to Intervene: How the War in Bosnia Ended,” *Brookings*, December 1, 1998, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/decision-to-intervene-how-the-war-in-bosnia-ended/>.

¹⁰⁶ “Famous Quotes About Srebrenica Massacre,” *Aljazeera*, July 11, 2005, <https://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2005/07/20084101354675721.html>.

It was only after the international community became aware of the severity of the genocide and the Serb concentration camps, hearkening back to images of the Holocaust, that international pressure forced the UN to act in earnest. The UN intended to restrict its actions solely to supplying increased humanitarian aid; the notion of establishing the safe zone at Srebrenica was not planned, rather it was the culmination of mounting ethnic violence and Morillon's rogue proclamation to the civilians who had fled to the valley. McQueen explains that "designating Srebrenica a safe area was an *ad hoc* response to a crisis: community interests dictated that something be done, and state interests enabled acceptance, albeit hesitant, of the policy, perhaps explaining why no clear enforcement measures were considered at the time [Resolution] 819 was adopted."¹⁰⁷ When faced with massive human loss and genocide, the UN made a knee jerk decision to implement safe zones because, on the face of it, the action addressed the crisis. The UN did not decide to institute a safe zone because of increased interest, or a serious consideration of its willingness to increase military and financial exposure in the conflict. The problems began to arise, as noted by McQueen, with the *implementation* of the policy.

It was, at all points, clear what needed to be done to protect the safe zone. That should not be equivocated. It is clear from the French suggestions to the Security Council directly following the passage of Resolution 819 that the military requirements of the undertaking were understood. All of the actors involved understood that a large number of highly armed soldiers with air support was needed to ensure the protection and stability of Srebrenica as a safe area. The disconnect between the establishment of the safe area and the implementation of the steps required to protect it can be boiled down to the interests, or lack thereof, of the UN.

¹⁰⁷ McQueen, *Intervention*, 68.

It is important to note again that the soldiers protecting the outpost were Dutch. Luttwak argues that, in multinational military scenarios, even, “the best-trained and best-paid forces of the most ambitious armies... avoid risk at all costs,” to minimize casualties or avoid them entirely. The Dutch had no reason to sacrifice their soldiers to protect Bosniaks. The UN was aware of this dynamic and wrote the mandate accordingly. Dutchbat was not required by its mandate to protect the safe area if doing so put peacekeepers at risk. Additionally, the Dutch defense minister, a man with no involvement in the UN or UNPROFOR, was the individual who ordered the UN’s capitulation to the Serbs. The minister was naturally most loyal to the five hundred Dutchbat soldiers at Srebrenica; he valued their survival over the survival of the men and boys in the enclave. This observation should not serve as a moral indictment of the Dutchbat soldiers or the Dutch defense minister, as those lines of thought fall outside of the scope of this argument. This observation, however, is valuable to note in considering the interests and willingness of the actors in this tragedy. The troops generally involved in UN interventions are not native to the place of the conflict, which complicates their incentives and desires, and thus increases the precariousness of the situation for the protected group.

Dutchbat soldiers, in addition to being more committed to their own survival than to protecting the safe area, were also poorly equipped. In tactical terms, the safe area at Srebrenica was disastrous. Honig and Both write that “the Dutch were outnumbered, surrounded, and the city was indefensible.”¹⁰⁸ When, in the final days of the Serb attack, UNPROFOR issued an order for Dutchbat to employ, “every possible measure... to reinforce these positions, including measures related to weapons,” Dutchbat simply could not fulfill the task.¹⁰⁹ Asking 500 men to

¹⁰⁸ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica*, 14.

defend a group of foreign civilians when they are greatly outnumbered and lack adequate military resources is absurd.

The UN's low willingness to properly implement the safe zone at Srebrenica is clear in the number of Dutch soldiers sent, and the armaments with which they were supplied. The UN's lack of proper action regarding the military French suggestions could perhaps be forgiven if the UN had more quickly realized the danger of the situation and responded appropriately. The UN, however, did not. It chose, at various points, to not use NATO close air support to aid the outnumbered Dutchbat forces. At numerous junctures in the existence of Srebrenica as a safe area, and certainly in the earlier days of the final Serb offensive, air support could have been used to defend the safe area. UN and UNPROFOR officials simply waited too long to implement it; when they finally fell back on their NATO allies in the final days of the conflict at Srebrenica, the Serb army had already taken Dutch hostages. While Janvier's and UNPROFOR's main worry regarding the use of air support was escalating the conflict, the judgment call was a bad one on two counts. First, there was no legitimate alternative to the use of close air support, as Dutchbat was clearly incapable of mounting a defense of the safe area. Second, there was no reason to believe that the Serb attack was not a legitimate attempt to take the safe area. Janvier's and UNPROFOR's refusal to use NATO close air support reflected their lack of willingness to be involved in the conflict. At this critical juncture, Janvier and UNPROFOR made a decision that aligned with their interests and willingness over the safety of the Bosniaks and the proper execution of the safe zone.

McQueen suggests that "states underestimated, perhaps willfully, the extent to which it would be difficult to implement an effective safe area policy: they seemed to be under the illusion that if the Security Council proclaimed the existence of safe areas, local belligerents

would take them seriously.”¹¹⁰ Her words effectively explain the series of events that led to the downfall of Srebrenica. The entire enterprise at Srebrenica was based on the belief that merely saying the outpost was a UN-protected safe area would make it one. However, this was completely at odds with the reality of the situation as observed by the French and noted to the Security Council as early as 1993. Even as Serbs repeatedly shelled the compound, Janvier feared that “larger-scale air strikes... would risk drawing UNPROFOR into an all-out war with the Serbs.”¹¹¹ In reality, the UN had been involved in a war with the Serbs since the establishment of the safe area in 1993, or, at the very least, since the beginning of the Serb offensive roughly a week before the enclave fell. After the severity of the situation became clear during the final Serb assault, Sergeant Batalona, who worked in the operations room at Srebrenica as part of the UNPROFOR mission, said that “everybody got a fright. You could easily get killed... as far as I knew, we had not been sent to Srebrenica to defend the enclave, but rather as some kind of spruced-up observers.”¹¹²

It is ultimately important to look at the disaster of Srebrenica as a failure of the most basic objective of humanitarian intervention and safe areas. It is clear that the safe area did not protect the individuals it claimed that it could keep secure. State and international organizations undertake humanitarian intervention to restore rights to civilians in conflict zones when war has taken the rights away. In the case of the safe area at Srebrenica, the Serbs were committing genocide against the Bosniaks; these acts spanned murder, rape, and forced detention. The safe area was meant to be a physical space where individuals could shelter and have basic access to vital resources like food, water, and medical care. In creating the safe zone, the UN *guaranteed*

¹¹⁰ McQueen, *Intervention*, 75.

¹¹¹ Honig and Both, *Srebrenica* 20.

¹¹² Honig and Both, *Srebrenica* 14.

these rights to the people who sought refuge there. Because of this guarantee, persecuted individuals came to Srebrenica specifically. Had there not been a guarantee of safety, individuals would have behaved differently. As Luttwak suggested, many individuals likely would have fled as far as they could. They certainly would not have congregated by the tens of thousands in a deep valley in the center of Bosnia with no avenues for easy escape. The disaster at Srebrenica was massive because the UN had gathered large numbers of Bosniaks in one place.

The actual act of gathering, in this case, is not problematic in a vacuum. The UN offered protection in this area and people freely elected to seek that protection. The promise that the UN made is also not, in a vacuum, problematic. The UN declared to Bosniaks, to Serbs, and to the entire world, that Bosniaks fleeing the genocide would be safe at Srebrenica, guarded by the auspices of the United Nations. What is deeply problematic, and what is at the crux of the horrifying events that happened in Srebrenica, is the UN's lack of preparedness to keep its promise. While there could be extenuating factors— perhaps the UN probably did not realize at the outset that keeping its promise would require a large-scale military operation— it became clear quickly that such action was required to adequately protect the enclave. In the face of this clarity, with the UN in possession of this objective truth, the organization chose not to pursue the actions that would protect the safe zone. These actions could have included increasing troops on the ground or using NATO close air support. Additionally, the UN underestimated the challenges of the safe zone itself; it allowed armed Bosniaks to take shelter within the safe zone's borders, which both invalidated UNPROFOR's mandate of impartiality and neutrality and likely further incentivized the Serb attack on the enclave. The UN's ambivalence regarding the armed Bosniaks within the safe further supports the argument that the UN lacked the interest and will to properly implement the safe zone. The UN could have stopped the armed Bosniaks from entering

the safe area, or retroactively addressed their presence in the enclave. This situation additionally reveals the complexities of creating a safe space for a targeted population. It is very difficult to distinguish between groups in a conflict, and more so to distinguish civilians from guerilla fighters. Creating a safe area without accidentally harboring the wrong group or harboring military forces requires large amounts of effort and attention to detail. The UN undertaking at Srebrenica lacked those aspects externally in relation to the larger conflict with the Serbs, and also internally in the governance of the safe area.

Ultimately, the safe area at Srebrenica created an avenue for the international community to 'address the situation' in Bosnia without actually addressing the root causes of the conflict. Because the UN had little interest in the conflict, the idea of creating a safe zone presented a moral hazard. The UN could silence international calls for action through implementing a safe zone, an option it believed to require less effort and involvement than other forms of intervention. By implementing peacekeeping forces and creating an international coalition through NATO to provide air support, the UN could show that it was trying to help the situation. In reality, when faced with the remarkable complexity of the conflict, humanitarian intervention provided an alternative to becoming militarily or diplomatically involved. When looking at the physical devastation of the wars and the images of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, the UN felt pressured by the international community to take action. Humanitarian intervention allowed the UN to do so, fulfilling its essentially symbolic duty with as little commitment as possible.

Humanitarian intervention and the use of safe zones creates a moral hazard for the international community accordingly. When an actor does not have interests that inform a level of willingness commensurate with practical challenges, and the actor intervenes in a crisis anyway, moral hazard plays a role. The actor feels pressure to address the conflict, but its low

levels of interest motivate it to choose the easiest option. Only, it is a misconception that humanitarian intervention and safe zones are an easier way out than other diplomatic or military solutions. As demonstrated, humanitarian intervention is difficult to successfully undertake and requires large amounts of effort, commitment, and funding. With the safe zone at Srebrenica, the UN was attempting to put a band-aid on the gushing wound of the war in Yugoslavia. Instead of taking on the labor-intensive task of treating the injury with a method such as peace talks, the UN chose what it believed to be the least consuming option. Ultimately, not only did the safe zone not address the larger conflict in Bosnia or Yugoslavia, but because the UN was not prepared to surmount the challenges of the safe zone, thousands of innocent lives were lost. This line of analysis is important because the continued popularity of safe areas allows actors in the international community an avenue to symbolically address crises. Not only does choosing this avenue keep actors from actually addressing crises and helping the individuals experiencing them, but, if safe zones are this chosen avenue of avoiding obligation, the likelihood of increasing harm, rather than mitigating it, is high.

Case Study: Operation Provide Comfort, Iraqi Kurdistan

History

Operation Provide Comfort was a humanitarian aid mission to provide resources and areas of safety for Kurds in northern Iraq. It was undertaken by the same multinational coalition, helmed by the United States, that executed military operations during Operation Desert Storm. The conflict between the Kurds and the Iraqi government that ultimately forced many Kurds to flee was primarily rooted in the history of the region— namely how European powers and the United States divided the area of Kurdistan and its roughly thirty million Kurdish residents following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹³ Kurds, an ethnic group tracing back to indigenous groups on the plains of Mesopotamia, are racially and ethnically distinct from Arabs.¹¹⁴ The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, though some Kurds subscribe to other religious practices.¹¹⁵ Following World War One, Kurdistan was divided into modern-day Turkey, Syria, Iran, Armenia, and Iraq. Kurds now live predominantly in south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-western Iran, and south-western Armenia.¹¹⁶ Though they are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, their statelessness and distinct identity have led to serious discrimination. This discrimination and hatred runs so deep that Turkey has even conducted a bombing campaign against Syrian Kurds despite the fact that Syrian Kurds are fighting against Assad’s forces in concert with the Turkish army.¹¹⁷ Sustained and violent othering of Kurds across the Middle East has aided the creation of an independent Kurdish identity bolstered by powerful Kurdish military units and political groups.

¹¹³ “Who are the Kurds?” *BBC News*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440>.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ “Syria: Kurds,” *Minority Rights Group International*, last updated March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-5/>.

The case of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish territory in northern Iraq, is unique. Today, Iraqi Kurdistan is an autonomous, largely self-governed region with consulates separate from Iraq's in nations across the globe.¹¹⁸ Its capital is Erbil and its roughly eight million citizens are governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).¹¹⁹ Iraqi Kurdistan is more prosperous than Iraq in a variety of ways: the KRG oversees better school systems, decent access to medical care, secure oil fields, and comparatively high levels of foreign investment.¹²⁰ Not only does Iraqi Kurdistan have a generally higher quality of life than Iraq, but that quality of life has been maintained over the past half-decade as Iraqi forces battled ISIS. The power of Iraqi Kurdistan's army, the Peshmerga, proved to be a successful deterrent to ISIS's aggression. The terrorist group left Kurdish territory mostly alone, and the Peshmerga even seized the opportunity to take more Iraqi land in the chaos of the fight against ISIS.¹²¹ In 2017, an independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan received an overwhelming majority of votes, leading to a declaration of independence by Masoud Barzani, the leader of the KRG. Though the central Iraqi government opposed this bid for independence and it eventually failed, its original success makes it clear that Iraqi Kurdistan is a powerful player in Iraq and the Middle East. The power of this Kurdish faction stirs questions of the possibility of eventual independence, or even the creation of a full Kurdish state as the Iraqi, Turkish, and Syrian governments continue to fray.¹²²

The rise of Iraqi Kurdistan was a direct result of Operation Provide Comfort. Before international intervention in the early 1990s, the Kurdish situation in Iraq was bleak. In 1970, Saddam Hussein, then Vice President of Iraq, reached an agreement with the Kurds to end a

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Zack Beauchamp, "11 facts that explain the escalating crisis in Iraq," *Vox*, June 13, 2014, <https://www.vox.com/2014/6/13/5803712/11-things-iraq-crisis-isis>.

¹²² "Iraqi Kurdistan Profile," *BBC News*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28147263>.

revolt in the north. While the agreement gave Kurds increased autonomy, Hussein began a sustained campaign against them in the following years.¹²³ In the early 1980s, the U.S. began selling Iraq items to make chemical weapons with the intention of arming Iraq against Iran, though the operation also supplied Hussein with the means to use chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurdish resistance fighters.¹²⁴ Following a 1988 incident where Hussein killed 5,000 Kurds with these U.S.-supplied chemical weapons, America deemed its alliance with Iraq in the conflict against Iran too important to change its policies. Ultimately, “the United States did not even impose sanctions,” against Iraq, or stop supplying these materials.¹²⁵

In 1991, after Operation Desert Storm and the U.S. victory in Kuwait, the Kurds revolted again. It was likely their best opportunity to do so; the Iraqi army had been weakened by the brief war, Shiites in southern Iraq were also fighting back against the beleaguered government forces, and the U.S. had encouraged Iraqis to rise up against the Hussein regime during the Gulf War.¹²⁶ However, the Kurdish and Shiite forces were not able to make much headway, even against the weakened Iraqi government forces. The Kurds were plainly outmatched by Iraqi helicopters and heavy weaponry. The U.S. wavered on whether or not to intervene; on one hand, the U.S. had encouraged the revolt, had previously ignored the plight of the Kurds and had occasionally relied on Iraqi Kurds as allies in the region, but on the other hand, Americans did not want to become involved in a complicated Iraqi civil war.¹²⁷ As the U.S. wavered on

¹²³ Rick Noack, “The long, winding history of American dealings with Iraq’s Kurds,” *Washington Post*, October 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/10/17/the-long-winding-history-of-american-dealings-with-iraqs-kurds-2/?utm_term=.6fb7875b6ece.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Glenn Kessler, “History lesson: When the United States looked the other way on chemical weapons,” *Washington Post*, September 4, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/04/history-lesson-when-the-united-states-looked-the-other-way-on-chemical-weapons/?utm_term=.9cae3850e886

¹²⁶ Philip A. Meek, “Operation Provide Comfort: A Case Study in Humanitarian Relief and Foreign Assistance,” *Air Force Law Review* 37 (1994): 225.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

intervention, roughly two million Kurds fled Iraq, heading north into Iraq's mountainous border region with Turkey. Lieutenant Colonel Ronald J. Brown commented that "for [the Kurds], to flee provided the only hope for survival."¹²⁸ As the number of refugees mounted, the Turkish government shut its borders, fearing that an influx of Kurds would stoke minority sentiment in their own country, in addition to creating a significant financial burden.¹²⁹ The result was millions of Kurds stranded in the frigid mountains of northern Iraq, fearing a return home, but left largely without options. During this period of limbo, many Kurds died from exposure and malnutrition.¹³⁰

The United States faced a serious humanitarian crisis for which it felt partly responsible. McQueen argues that the eventual intervention was due in part to, "pressure on states to adhere to the values that they themselves had espoused."¹³¹ Additionally, the 'CNN effect' on American citizens began to popularize the idea of intervention, as television news played heartbreaking segments on the plight of the Kurds in the Karakoram. U.S. officials also feared looking weak by not responding to a brutal rebellion in the country the U.S. had just defeated.¹³² The UN Security Council, "adopted Resolution 688... condemning the repression of the Iraqi civilian population... and insisting that Iraq allow immediate access by international humanitarian organizations," on April 5, 1991.¹³³ A few weeks later, on April 16th, President Bush declared an Air Force operation to supply the Kurds with blankets, food, and other humanitarian supplies, beginning Operation Provide Comfort.¹³⁴ The first stage of the plan was to provide emergency relief, and

¹²⁸ Ronald J. Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq, 1991: With Marines in Operation Provide Comfort* (History and Museums Division Headquarters, 1995), 1.

¹²⁹ McQueen, *Intervention*, 25.

¹³⁰ "Remembering the Kurdish Uprising of 1991," *BBC News*, April 7, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-35967389>.

¹³¹ McQueen, *Intervention*, 38.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Meek, "Operation Provide," 226.

¹³⁴ McQueen, *Intervention*, 25.

the second was to provide sustained humanitarian aid with the help of fellow Joint Task Force (JTF) members England, Germany, France, and Italy. The JTF was notably comprised of members of Desert Storm's multinational coalition.

Operation Provide Comfort first had to find the refugees; they were scattered across wide swaths of remote, inhospitable terrain. The task force identified twelve major camps in the mountainous region, each full of tens of thousands of individuals in desperate need of food, clothing, and medical supplies. Sections of the JTF went to work providing assistance to these camps, while other forces encouraged Kurds to move to the mountain camps, so they could have access to the resources there. This process, referred to as 'temporary resettlement,' was undertaken to facilitate the provision of aid and security to the Kurds.¹³⁵

Executing the second part of the plan, creating a system to provide sustained humanitarian aid, involved, "[moving] the Kurds from the mountain camps and [resettling] them in northern Iraq... General Garner's JTF Bravo, formed with conventional forces... entered Iraq and created a security zone."¹³⁶ In the process of moving refugees from the mountain camps to the newly constructed camps in a security area in northern Iraq, it became clear that many wished to simply return home, "regardless of the condition."¹³⁷ About a third of the refugees were from the nearby northern Iraq town of Duhok, which was under Iraqi control. The JTF eventually mounted an operation and took Duhok back. Following the fight, the JTF rebuilt key infrastructure in the city to ensure that it could receive and sustain the refugees.¹³⁸ The security area eventually became a 10,000 square kilometer area of northern Iraq, protected by JTF

¹³⁵ Brown, *Humanitarian Operations*, 8.

¹³⁶ Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991* (Department of the Army, 2004), 170.

¹³⁷ Rudd, *Intervention*, 177.

¹³⁸ Rudd, *Intervention*, 183.

airpower's maintenance of a no-fly zone above the country's 36th parallel.¹³⁹ It is also valuable to note that the Peshmerga worked in concert with JTF forces. Gordon Rudd writes that "[the JTF] developed a cooperative relationship with [the Peshmerga], making use of their capabilities."¹⁴⁰ While the Peshmerga had not been strong enough to beat the Iraqi army outright, the Peshmerga helped bolster JTF forces. More importantly, the force ensured that a military presence continued to exist in northern Iraq following the withdrawal of JTF forces.

Once the refugees were resettled in the security area, the JTF began the process of leaving Iraq, handing over humanitarian efforts to the UNHCR and NGOs.¹⁴¹ While these agencies were capable of taking over the relief aspects of Operation Provide Comfort, the UN initially refused to provide peacekeeping forces to maintain the security of northern Iraq.¹⁴² The UN eventually reached a diplomatic agreement with the Iraqi government that allowed UN 'security police' to protect UNHCR and NGO facilities, though the UN did not have adequate staff to fill those roles, so it cobbled together a mixture of UN staffers and individual contractors from private relief organizations.¹⁴³ A transition period ensuring the ability of UN security police and the Peshmerga to protect the area was coupled with negotiations with the Iraqi government. In these negotiations, JTF officials stressed that the "Combined Brigade Task Force was on full alert and ready to reenter Iraq."¹⁴⁴ This move was aimed at deterring aggressive actions by the Iraqi military following JTF withdrawal. There were also explicit contingency plans in place for potential conflict, and JTF air power continued regular daily flights in and around the no-fly zone

¹³⁹ McQueen, *Intervention*, 25.

¹⁴⁰ Rudd, *Intervention*, 187.

¹⁴¹ Rudd, *Intervention*, 201.

¹⁴² Rudd, *Intervention*, 202.

¹⁴³ Rudd, *Intervention*, 202.

¹⁴⁴ Rudd, *Intervention*, 216.

above northern Iraq.¹⁴⁵ The transition ultimately proved successful, and the Kurds were left mostly alone in northern Iraq. Over the following decades, bolstered by the deposition of Hussein, the Iraq War, and ISIS's invasion, the Kurds have continued to expand their military and oil infrastructure, growing wealthier and more powerful.

Operation Provide Comfort was successful in achieving both its short-term goal of stabilization and its long-term goal of providing humanitarian aid and eventually transitioning peacefully to a new status quo for the region. It is important to note that, "throughout the most demanding phases... the coalition [provided] the command and control, as well as the security, airlift, and logistics needed to care for and resettle the refugees in northern Iraq."¹⁴⁶ The success of the mission required coordination across a multinational coalition, including air power, ground forces, and humanitarian branches aimed at providing food, shelter, and medical attention. Some operations, such as retaking Dohuk, required all three of these groups to work together closely. Not only did the JTF achieve these military goals and create a successful security area, but it planned and executed a successful transition of power to the UNHCR and NGOs.

Analysis

McQueen writes that "the safe haven in northern Iraq was... successful... it provided adequate security, and sustenance for the Kurds within their country of origin; it successfully deterred through troops and air power any reprisals from Saddam Hussein; and it retained sufficient international support to avoid the fracturing of the 1991 Gulf War coalition."¹⁴⁷

Ultimately, Operation Provide Comfort is a clear example of a successfully implemented safe zone. It protected hundreds of thousands of Kurds from the Iraqi army, moved them to physically

¹⁴⁵ Rudd, *Intervention*, 217.

¹⁴⁶ Rudd, *Intervention*, 219.

¹⁴⁷ McQueen, *Intervention*, 47.

safe locations, and transitioned power back to the Iraqi Kurds without incident. However, the circumstances that allowed the JTF to implement the safe zone in this successful manner are specific and not reproducible, at least as a sustainable framework for humanitarian intervention.

The actors involved, primarily the United States, had decent levels of interest in instituting a safe zone to help the Iraqi Kurds. The US was not motivated solely by a sense of responsibility for the role it played previously in the oppression of the Kurds, nor by the fact that it had supported the Kurdish rebellion. The US was also driven by a desire to secure stability for the region as a whole to help allies in the area, and using a no-fly zone to protect the safe area additionally allowed U.S. Air Force personnel to spy on the Iraqi government.¹⁴⁸ Other leading coalition members also had interests that aligned with intervention. British Prime Minister John Major sought to establish himself as an equal to his martial predecessor, Margaret Thatcher. The French, in the face of growing international irrelevance, wanted to signal their continued importance on the world stage.¹⁴⁹ None of these interests, however, seem large enough to motivate these nations to risk the lives of their soldiers in executing the safe zone. These interests would inform a level of willingness to become involved in the conflict, but with each of these states lacking a serious security interest in the region and the Iraqi Kurds, that willingness would not be large enough to surmount the practical challenges of the situation.

If the interests of the states involved were low, and willingness was accordingly not commensurate with the challenges of implementing the safe zone, how was Operation Provide Comfort successful? The answer lies in the fact that these nations *did not have to have* a level of willingness high enough to surmount the practical challenges that generally accompany safe

¹⁴⁸ McQueen, *Intervention*, 44.

¹⁴⁹ McQueen, *Intervention*, 45.

areas. Most of the practical challenges that needed to be addressed with the safe zone in northern Iraq had already been surmounted by Desert Storm. All of the aspects that needed to be considered and organized to undertake the humanitarian relief mission had already been executed for the military operation conducted against Iraq. The interests and willingness of the actors only had to be large enough to surmount the very low cost of implementing Operation Provide Comfort. The actors did not have to gather, arm, or coordinate forces. Additionally, and very notably, the cost of implementing the safe zone did not involve a large risk of danger for JTF troops. The JTF had already clearly shown its ability to mount military operations and inflict harm against Iraq. Those reassurances allowed the JTF to feel fairly confident that it would not receive much pushback from the Iraqi army. Ultimately, the practical challenges and possible costs of the intervention, both financial and in terms of loss of life, were very low. Because these obstacles were uniquely small, the marginal interests of the actors created enough willingness to surmount these challenges.

It is also important to note that, because of Desert Storm, the JTF was able to largely ignore the concepts of impartiality and neutrality. It was already clear and established that the JTF was not a neutral and impartial force. Its position as both relatively insulated from danger, and also capable of responding to it, additionally did not incentivize it to hide behind the tenets of impartiality and neutrality. Since the JTF was neither constrained by the ideals of impartiality and neutrality nor could JTF soldiers use those tenets to justify inaction, the implementation of the safe area was well-coordinated and successful. Ultimately, impartiality and neutrality either constrain the tools at an intervening actor's disposal, making the task at hand more difficult, or the tenets provide cover for intervening forces to make decisions prioritizing their safety over the safety of the group they have intervened to protect. Because of the unique situation of the JTF

during Operation Provide Comfort, these complicating considerations played no role in the mission.

Another aspect that aided the success of the mission was the fact that the soldiers involved in the multinational coalition reported directly to their normal military superiors, who coordinated amongst themselves and their nations at a higher level. While these soldiers were at a disconnect to the people they were protecting, similar to the peacekeepers considered during the Bosnia case study, the soldiers were operating within their normal military framework. Additionally, the JTF was comprised of the same forces that had bolstered the US military during Desert Storm. All of the logistical problems of coordinating with forces across countries had already been sorted out prior to the Gulf War. McQueen writes that:

the multilateral pursuit of community interests throughout the Gulf Conflict period later facilitated from an instrumental perspective the adoption of a safety zone approach... the channels of communication developed during the hostilities with Iraq remained in place and eased decision-making about how to proceed with the safe haven policy. The military activities of the three contributors, the US, Britain and France, were easily coordinated, so the safe haven was mounted effectively in record time. As the costs and tasks of the operation were spread among 30 states, no one state bore too great a burden.¹⁵⁰

In short, the unique situation of the Gulf War preceding the implementation of the safe area in northern Iraq positioned the multinational force remarkably well to undertake its task. Not only were all aspects of interoperability already established and tested, but the burden of funding was distributed across numerous actors.

Additionally, in terms of the success of the operational aspects of the safe zone, the physical task was not particularly difficult. The hardest part was physically finding Kurds in the widespread, remote area. The JTF did not have to worry about distinguishing between groups of individuals or making moral decisions regarding which individuals would be allowed entrance

¹⁵⁰ McQueen, *Intervention*, 37.

into safe areas. Northern Iraq already was inhabited almost entirely by Kurds, so the forces only needed to find them. This concentration of the Kurds also made it easier to create and protect the safe zone; a hard barrier and no-fly zone at the 36th parallel was the clear option. The forces did not have to worry about a safe area surrounded on all sides by belligerents. Instead, there was a clear barrier to protect, and all other borders of the safe area were with other countries.

It is also valuable to note that the movement of individuals is less problematic in this case study than in the previous discussion of Srebrenica. While Operation Provide Comfort did involve the physical movement of people into camps, it was with the express purpose of providing aid more effectively. There was an undeniable interest on the part of the JTF to keep the Kurds in Iraq to avoid destabilizing the region, but the JTF also had legitimate and practical humanitarian intentions in gathering Kurds. Once the Kurds were gathered and resettled in camps, they were given aid and support by JTF forces in ways that would not have been possible if Kurds remained spread across a large and mountainous geographic area. The retaking of Dohuk further ensured that the safe area included a town with appropriate urban facilities to render aid. Additionally, “without including Dohuk in the security zone there wouldn’t be enough of a populated area with urban facilities to get the Kurds moving back.”¹⁵¹ While it aligned with the interests of the intervening actor to keep the Kurds in northern Iraq, the JTF also expended a large amount of energy to ensure that the Kurds were protected and comfortable. Overall, the JTF’s actions demonstrate a genuine humanitarian concern and a commitment to helping the Kurds rebuild and maintain a community.

¹⁵¹ “Iraqi Kurds, Operation Provide Comfort, and the Birth of Iraq’s Opposition,” *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <https://adst.org/2016/02/iraqi-kurds-operation-provide-comfort-and-the-birth-of-iraqs-opposition/>.

As interest and willingness were great enough to meet the challenges of safe zones in this case, the proposed method would generally conclude that moral hazard played no role in Operation Provide Comfort. McQueen, however, suggests that there *was* a moral hazard problem. She identifies moral hazard in the events following JTF withdrawal from Iraq. McQueen finds problems with the lack of serious diplomatic talks at the end of Operation Provide Comfort which could have clearly established northern Iraq as autonomous or pursued its reintegration into Iraq. Rather than resolving these questions, the ability to pass off responsibility to the UN and NGOs created a moral hazard for the JTF. She critiques that, “[Operation Provide Comfort’s] one significant drawback was that its implementation was not linked to a broader solution to the Iraqi problem; the coalition that established it was eager to withdraw, so no clear provisions were put in place to reintegrate the safe haven and its surroundings into Iraq or to clarify the area’s status generally beyond autonomy in a *de facto* sense.”¹⁵² However, there are serious problems with McQueen’s argument. First, the idea that northern Iraq could have been reintegrated into Iraq in a successful manner that ensured the continued safety of the Kurds is ridiculous; Iraqi history provided a clear roadmap to show that this eventuality was virtually impossible, and as such, would have been irresponsible for the JTF to pursue. Second, the likelihood that Iraq would have willingly agreed to the secession of northern Iraq is nonexistent. It is not reasonable to expect that the JTF would have been willing to force Iraq’s hand militarily or with serious political action. The JTF had neither the interest nor the will to pursue the conflict beyond ensuring the safety of Iraqi Kurds. Additionally, as the end of Operation Provide Comfort unfolded, the JTF did help train the Peshmerga and maintain

¹⁵² McQueen, *Intervention*, 47.

the no-fly zone. At the very least, these actions allowed Iraqi Kurds the time and space necessary to rebuild and train their own military so that they could later take on their own defense.

The circumstances that led to the success of the safe zone in Iraqi Kurdistan were so specific and fortuitous that they are unlikely to be reproduced in humanitarian crises in the coming decades. However, in discussing the success of Operation Provide Comfort, it needs to be clear that the JTF did not succeed because it recognized the shortcomings of humanitarian intervention and changed their plans accordingly. Operation Provide Comfort was a successful intervention because external, irreproducible factors aligned the JTF's low level of interests and willingness with low practical challenges. This intervention avoided the classic trap of lack of interest, low willingness, moral hazard, and poor outcome purely coincidentally. It is clear that the success of Operation Provide Comfort was due to these lucky circumstances and not a larger understanding of the problems inherent to humanitarian intervention. This fact is clear in how the JTF handled its withdrawal from northern Iraq. The UN 'security police' and cobbled-together staff left in northern Iraq were entirely incapable of defending the safe area and had less interest and willingness to do so than the JTF. Northern Iraq only continued to be safe because of the credible threat of US retaliation if Iraq violated the no-fly zone and the additional deterrent of the Peshmerga. While it is important to look at this successful case of humanitarian intervention to see what conditions allowed the policy to be implemented effectively, it is also vitally important to note that almost all of those conditions were coincidental and unique to this situation.

Case Study: Operation Turquoise, Rwanda

History

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda was one of the most horrifying events of modern times. In a matter of months, over 800,000 Rwandans, mostly of the Tutsi ethnic group, were killed, and over two million Rwandans, mostly of the Hutu ethnic group, fled the country.¹⁵³ The international community's relative lack of intervention and the role of colonialism in creating the ethnic tensions within the nation characterize the Rwandan genocide.

Rwanda is "one of the few African countries with only two significant ethnic groups, with Hutus (85%) and Tutsis (14%) accounting for most of the population."¹⁵⁴ When Germany colonized the nation in 1895, it supported the existing Tutsi monarchy, and after Rwanda shifted hands to Belgium following WWI, the Tutsis continued to be the favored group. The Belgian government supported Tutsis over Hutus as the group in power because of the Hamitic hypothesis that "African 'civilization' was due to racially distinct Caucasoid invaders from the north/northeast of Africa."¹⁵⁵ The notion that Tutsis were Hamites was based on the observations of German and Belgian colonial officials noting that since "[Tutsis] ruled over a majority, they 'must' possess incongruous martial skill and intelligence, which, combined with the observation that the Tutsi... possessed a different physiology to that of the Hutu, was taken to indicate Tutsi provenance outside of Rwanda."¹⁵⁶ Essentially, the Belgians supported the Tutsi minority as the main governing group because they believed them to be more Caucasian. The Belgian government began a policy of Tutsification, instituting a system of Tutsi-led chiefdoms,

¹⁵³ "Rwandan Genocide," History, <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/rwandan-genocide>.

¹⁵⁴ Hikaru Yamashita, *Humanitarian Spaces and International Politics: The Creation of Safe Areas* (London: Routledge, 2004), 133.

¹⁵⁵ Nigel Eltringham, "'Invaders who have stolen the country': The Hamitic Hypothesis, Race, and the Rwandan Genocide," *Social Identities* 14, no. 4 (July 2006): 425.

¹⁵⁶ Eltringham, "Invaders," 431.

mandatory ethnic identity cards, elite schools only for Tutsis, and new laws to oppress Hutus.¹⁵⁷

It is also important to note that another motivation likely played into the decisions the Belgians made as colonizers. A common method of ruling colonies during that time period was ‘divide and rule,’ which Richard Morrock defines in his essay, *Heritage of Strife: The Effects of Colonialist "Divide and Rule" Strategy upon the Colonized Peoples*, as, “ the conscious effort of an imperialist power to create and/or turn to its own advantage the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, tribal, or religious differences within the population of a subjugated colony.”¹⁵⁸ Favoring a minority granted a cohesive identity and social position to a small portion of the population; by far the majority of the population remained scattered, disenfranchised, and without resources, bolstering the power of the Belgians.

A 1961 coup eventually established a Hutu-led government, which, over time, led to discrimination against Tutsis, including rules that allocated government funds and resources to Tutsis on the basis of their percentage in the population.¹⁵⁹ Tensions continued to increase over the following years as Tutsi guerilla groups attacked Hutus, eliciting reprisal attacks on Tutsis. Tutsis began to flee the country as refugees, and, in 1987, Tutsi exiles in Uganda created the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) with the political goal of returning Tutsi refugees to Rwanda.¹⁶⁰

A series of negotiations to ease tensions between the ethnic groups and create a system of government in Rwanda that could support a sustainable peace between Hutus and Tutsis collapsed in 1990 when the RPF invaded Rwanda. While the Arusha Peace Agreement, a compromise that included most of the RPF’s wishes and the creation of the UN Assistance

¹⁵⁷ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 134.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Morrock, “Heritage of Strife: The Effects of Colonialist “Divide and Rule” Strategy upon the Colonized Peoples,” *Science and Society* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1973), 129.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 134.

Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), ended the conflict in 1993, many Hutus believed it to be too generous.¹⁶¹ The tenuous peace quickly began to deteriorate and, “alarming information... continued to pour into UNAMIR headquarters.”¹⁶² Even the CIA issued a report predicting the failure of the Arusha compromise and the beginning of mass violence.¹⁶³

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana, a Hutu, was assassinated. His plane was shot down during landing at the airport in Kigali,¹⁶⁴ though it remains unclear whether the mortar was launched by Tutsi rebels or Hutu extremists.¹⁶⁵ Regardless of the group that initiated the assassination, it set the following genocide and civil war (between the Tutsi RPF and Hutu Rwandan government forces) into motion as death squads began killing Tutsis and moderate Hutus.¹⁶⁶ While, in the conflict that followed, most systematic killings took place in areas held by the Rwandan government, the RPF also murdered thousands of Hutus, and the dangers of fleeing and poor conditions in refugee camps further increased the death toll.¹⁶⁷

The UN, despite UNAMIR’s presence in Rwanda, stayed largely on the sidelines of the conflict. On the heels of the spectacular international failure in Somalia, many thought that “to repeat the failure... would fatally damage the credibility of the UN.”¹⁶⁸ The UN justified its lack of action by, “[characterizing] the situation predominantly as a resumed civil war,” between the RPF and Rwandan government forces.¹⁶⁹ Finally, the Security Council passed Resolution 918 on May 17, 1994, calling for an expansion of UNAMIR’s mandate to alleviate the suffering of the

¹⁶¹ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 136.

¹⁶² Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 137

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Chris McGreal, “Why Rwanda said adieu to French,” *The Guardian*, January 16, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2009/jan/16/rwanda-english-genocide>.

¹⁶⁶ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 138.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 137.

¹⁶⁹ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 143.

Rwandan people, including through “the establishment and maintenance, where feasible, of secure humanitarian areas.”¹⁷⁰ The Resolution also called for UNAMIR to provide security to humanitarian relief shipments, emboldened UNAMIR troops to act in self-defense when protected areas or individuals were at risk, and asked for member states to help supply 5,500 troops to undertake these responsibilities.¹⁷¹ It is important to note that an estimated 200,000-500,000 of the ultimate 800,000 deaths had already happened by the end of April 1994 when the UN passed Resolution 918.¹⁷²

The UN, however, was unwilling to actualize the extension of UNAMIR’s mandate, despite the passage of Resolution 918. This reluctance eventually opened the door for another actor to play a defining role in intervention. It ended up being the French who, in early July, established a ‘safe humanitarian zone’ in Rwanda as part of a relief effort named Operation Turquoise (OT).¹⁷³ French Prime Minister Alain Juppé argued that OT would follow the guidelines Resolution 918 set forth for UNAMIR. France would essentially fulfill UNAMIR’s goals as a temporary proxy. Resolution 929, passed by the Security Council in late June, legitimized and reiterated Juppé’s goal by authorizing the French intervention until such a time that UNAMIR could fulfill the original mandate put forth by Resolution 918. Resolution 929 asserted, “the strictly humanitarian character of this operation which shall be conducted in an impartial and neutral fashion, and shall not constitute an interposition force between the

¹⁷⁰ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 146.

¹⁷¹ “Resolution 918,” Search Engine for the United Nations Security Council Resolutions, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/918>.

¹⁷² Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 138.

¹⁷³ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 150.

parties... [and which supports] the security... of displaced persons, refugees and civilians at risk.”¹⁷⁴

Juppé billed OT as a simple moral undertaking, saying, “are there not times where the sense of honor and the most elementary morality dictate the taking of risks?”¹⁷⁵ However, the reality is significantly more complicated. France had been a supporter of the Hutu regime for decades; the nation had even signed a military agreement with Hutu strongman and eventual president Juvenal Habyarimana in 1975. Habyarimana regularly visited France over his lifetime and had a close personal relationship with President Mitterand.¹⁷⁶ When France decided to launch OT in 1994, it had been supporting Habyarimana’s government against the RPF with weapons and tactical support since 1990.¹⁷⁷ Some lines of scholarship suggest that French motivations underlying support for the Hutu regime were largely sentimental; “France claimed Rwanda as a solid member of the Francophone bloc, viewed from Paris as a great family with itself as a generous and indulgent parent.”¹⁷⁸ In light of these ties, many countries and the RPF were wary of allowing France to intervene in the country. Landgren wrote that “the reluctance of many governments to see France involved militarily in Rwanda cannot be overstated, however, and stemmed from concerns that France’s interest in the situation was not neutral.”¹⁷⁹ Skeptics even argued that the humanitarian relief effort could be a thinly-veiled French attempt to aid the Hutu government in regaining control of the country.

¹⁷⁴ “Resolution 929,” Search Engine for the United Nations Security Council Resolutions, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/929>

¹⁷⁵ Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 151.

¹⁷⁶ Marlise Simons, “France’s Rwanda Connection,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/03/world/france-s-rwanda-connection.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Frank Smyth, “French Guns, Rwandan Blood,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/14/opinion/french-guns-rwanda-blood.html>.

¹⁷⁸ McGreal, “Adieu.”

¹⁷⁹ Landgren, “Safety Zones,” 448.

In *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda*, Alan Kuperman notes that the motivations surrounding French involvement in the Rwandan genocide is a continued debate in international politics and academia. Kuperman argues that, “France’s decision to intervene was compelled by French public outcry over continuing reports of anti-Tutsi atrocities,” but he recognizes how Human Rights Watch found evidence supporting that, “elements within the French defense establishment managed to funnel small amounts of arms and advice to the Hutu army from the outbreak of renewed fighting in April 1994... five additional arms shipments were sent from France to Rwanda through Zaire in May and June 1994.”¹⁸⁰ Kuperman identifies the ‘elements of the French defense establishment’ to be coordinated by a retired French officer on the payroll of the French government, operating out of the French embassy in Kigali.¹⁸¹ It is important to note, however, that France did not become involved in the conflict until the very end of June, and the safe zone was not established until July, so French physical involvement in the conflict was not concurrent to the covert arms shipments.

France argued publicly, however, that its plan had three main aims, all consistent with the wishes of the international community. The French aimed first to stop the flow of refugees into neighboring countries, both because of the poor humanitarian conditions in the camps, and also the possible destabilizing effects of the mass migration. Second, France aimed to fulfill UNAMIR’s duty of creating and sustaining a safe humanitarian zone until a ceasefire could be reached. Third, France aimed to offer neutral and impartial assistance to those in need.¹⁸² Ultimately, in the face of the UN’s own reluctance to become involved in the conflict, the UN

¹⁸⁰ Alan Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 44.

¹⁸¹ Kuperman, *Limits*, 45.

¹⁸² Yamashita, *Humanitarian*, 154.

could hardly denounce French plans to provide humanitarian aid in Rwanda, when French public aims were so in line with the wishes of the international community. In the absence of an organized international response to block France's efforts, France was allowed to go forward with OT.

The French established a very large safe humanitarian zone in the Cyangugu-Kibuye-Gikongoro area of southwest Rwanda in late June 1994.¹⁸³ The forces numbered 2,900 French military personnel, 1,200 of whom were combat troops, and they had 100 armed vehicles, 600 other vehicles, 10 helicopters, and 12 combat aircraft.¹⁸⁴ While somewhat well-armed, the forces were protecting a swath of land roughly one-fifth the size of Rwanda.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, the safe zone was established in an area where approximately 1.2 million individuals *were already living*. Some of the individuals in the safe zone were refugees, and some of were citizens of that area; the individuals already in the safe zone comprised both Hutus and Tutsis.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, individuals of all identities, but particularly Hutus, were constantly moving through the safe zone as the front of the conflict grew closer to the safe area. As the front pushed west through Rwanda, the RPF began winning, and the Hutu government forces were on the defensive.

The large scope of the safe zone meant that there was less than one troop per square mile of the safe zone, and there were 1.5 troops per one thousand individuals in the area.¹⁸⁷ Because there were so few troops compared to the population living in the safe area, and given the acreage of the safe area, it was difficult for the French to find Tutsis. The French forces were really only successful in finding and bringing Tutsis to better-protected areas within the safe

¹⁸³ Landgren, "Safety Zones," 449.

¹⁸⁴ Kuperman, *Limits*, 45.

¹⁸⁵ McQueen, *Intervention*, 141.

¹⁸⁶ Kuperman, *Limits*, 49.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

zone when the Tutsis were gathered in large groups, like the roughly 10,000 Tutsis who, “were saved at the stadium in Cyangugu.”¹⁸⁸ The French forces were less successful at finding and helping Tutsis spread across the large swaths of land in the safe zone because they lacked personnel and vehicles, but also because they were afraid of Hutu or Tutsi militia forces hiding in the bush.¹⁸⁹ The French forces did succeed in gathering surviving Rwandans in the safe zone into camps where they could protect them and provide them with aid more effectively, though a large number of these surviving Rwandans were Hutu.¹⁹⁰ The French allowed Hutus already within the safe zone to stay, spanning from civilians to militia members and interim government officials, and the soldiers allowed genocidaires and militiamen taking refuge from the approaching Tutsi army to enter the safe zone. Notably, allowing all groups of individuals into the safe area was technically required by Resolution 929’s call for impartiality and neutrality in the execution of the mandate.

While the French efforts undoubtedly saved lives, allowing the rival ethnic groups to occupy the same space led to “several thousand others probably [being] killed in the zone during the French occupation. French troops also did not intervene to stop looting or to arrest extremists. Lacking the forces, mandate, and interest to serve as a police force, they did not do so.”¹⁹¹ While mentions of death and looting exist in other sources such as Mel McNulty’s *France’s Role in Rwanda and External Military Intervention*, no sources offer further illumination regarding the looting and death within the safe zone, or numbers to explain its scope. This lack of information is likely due to the chaos and brevity of the safe zone, the poor documentation of events on the ground during that period, and the sustained French refusal to

¹⁸⁸ Kuperman, *Limits*, 50.

¹⁸⁹ Kuperman, *Limits*, 49.

¹⁹⁰ Kuperman, *Limits*, 50.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

open its archives regarding OT to the international community. It is likely, however, that there was ethnic conflict between Tutsis and Hutus in the safe zone because, as stated, the French could not patrol the area effectively. Just as there was widespread murder, looting, and chaos in Rwanda as a whole during this time, many of those same characteristics likely also existed in the safe zone.

Ultimately, Operation Turquoise saved an estimated 15,000 to 17,000 Tutsis.¹⁹² The RPF beat the remaining Rwandan government forces on July 13, 1994, and a new government was sworn in on July 19th in Kigali. The entire French mission to create and maintain a safe zone in Rwanda lasted only a number of weeks and notably came after a vast majority of the murders had already been committed. When the French left Rwanda in the middle of August, the OT safe area was passed to the jurisdiction of UNAMIR, in accordance with Resolution 929, which required power to eventually be shifted back to the UN-run force. UNAMIR was likely able to finally amass appropriate troop numbers and funding in the wake of the conflict because the objective of reconstruction was slightly clearer, and the likelihood of facing danger was significantly lower. Additionally, in the wake of such widespread and extreme violence, the international community was willing to invest in rebuilding, where it had not been willing to invest in aiding one side or the other during the war.

In the years following the conflict, many of the “the internally displaced were abruptly and, in places, violently dispersed out of the former safe zone,” both by the new Tutsi-led Rwandan government forces and other remaining militias.¹⁹³ While the safe zone was under UNAMIR’s control during this time, the French left quickly and without a plan to transition

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Landgren, “Safety Zones,” 451.

individuals from the camps back into society. Rwanda has, however, made a remarkable recovery overall in the past three decades. From 1994, when it was, “desperately poor, without skilled labor and resources, and the people demoralized and divided,” to today, unbelievable reconciliation and progress have occurred.¹⁹⁴ Security and stability efforts coupled with international humanitarian relief have helped forge the beginning of a new national identity for Rwandans.

Analysis

Ultimately, the French safe zone in Rwanda served part of its purpose; it saved roughly 15,000 Tutsis who otherwise likely would have been killed as part of the genocide. Notably, however, the number of individuals who died in the safe zone, either from ethnic violence or other forms of violence, is not known. The safe zone was too brief and instituted too late to have a larger positive effect. Saving 15,000 lives is remarkable, but the Rwandan genocide saw the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis, most of which occurred in the early stages of the genocide, and the French were only involved in humanitarian relief efforts for the last month of a three-month conflict. While this short time frame constrained the positive effects the French could have, this analysis will address how the short time frame might also have mitigated some of the negative effects the safe zone could have had.

First and foremost, it is important to fully deconstruct interest in this case. It is clear that the UN had an interest in the conflict, mainly because the international community expected the UN to fulfill its duty in addressing crises such as genocide. Not undertaking such a task, especially in the face of widespread international pressure, would likely corrode the legitimacy

¹⁹⁴ Tony Blair, “20 years after the genocide, Rwanda is a beacon of hope,” *The Guardian*, April 6, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/06/rwanda-genocide-beacon-hope-healing-nation>.

of the UN. While the UN surely also had a vested interest in the safety and well-being of the Rwandan people, the decisions it made as an institution revolved around larger political considerations. The UN needed to address the genocide in some fashion, but it was largely unwilling to do so in the face of failed humanitarian intervention in Somalia. It is clear that the UN was struggling with this problem of interest as it equivocated about the status of the conflict in Rwanda in the early stages, shrinking away from calling it a genocide. The UN did not have an interest large enough to cobble together forces, arm them, and deploy them with a clear objective. The UN did, however, have to at least appear to be addressing the conflict. The French desire to intervene accordingly created a moral hazard the United Nations could take advantage of. The UN had the opportunity to legitimize French operations under the banner of the UN. The UN could legitimize the intervention despite murky French intentions, and ease international pressure on the UN to address the conflict itself. If the UN blocked the French intervention and then did not become involved itself, it would incur the wrath of the international community. For the UN, the answer was simple.

France had interests in the conflict, though they were purely political. While these interests were the main motivating factor for its involvement, they were not particularly intense and revolved around the French government's affinity for the Hutu regime. At the very least, "France propped up an increasingly extremist regime, did not use its leverage over the Rwandan government to greater positive effect, and failed to take any action to halt the genocide when it started."¹⁹⁵ France did not have a broader national security interest in Rwanda, nor an economic or military interest. The closest to a strategic interest it could have had in Rwanda was supporting a fellow Francophone nation in a world increasingly dominated by Anglophone

¹⁹⁵ McQueen, *Intervention*, 129.

culture. McQueen argues that “The global dominance of Anglophone language and culture, as well as American economic might, came to be seen as threats to France’s state interests.”¹⁹⁶

While France was perhaps propelled into eventual involvement in the conflict by widespread public concern for the Tutsis as Kuperman suggests, it is clear that France was not motivated only by horror at the genocide. France had a close personal, military, and political relationship with the party perpetrating the genocide.

It is not clear what the goals of French involvement in the Rwandan conflict were, but they likely aligned with the type of argument Kuperman puts forth. He argues that, while there was a close relationship between the French government and the Hutu interim government, and that relationship included arming Hutu militias in the early days of the genocide, “the evidence suggests that France had already abandoned any intention of supporting the [Hutu military] in northwestern Rwanda by the end of the operation’s first week.”¹⁹⁷ The French force entered Rwanda through the Hutu stronghold in the northwestern corner of the nation, and continued southwest without aiding Hutu forces, “despite pleas from [Hutu militias] and from Rwanda’s Hutu government.”¹⁹⁸ Additionally, upon entering the country, many French soldiers were immediately disillusioned; any affinity the French infantrymen felt for the Hutu vanished when they saw the violence levied against the Tutsis.¹⁹⁹ It cannot be known what the original aims of the French government were, but it is clear from the very beginning of the intervention that the French force was not going to actively aid Hutu militias or the Hutu interim government.

It is important to look at will in this case to explain the events that took place after this original refusal to aid various Hutu forces. Though France had political interests in Rwanda, they

¹⁹⁶ McQueen, *Intervention*, 130.

¹⁹⁷ Kuperman, *Limits*, 47.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

were not particularly binding or vital. Its level of interest was inadequate to muster the appropriate funding, effort, or coordination necessary to overcome the practical problems of safe zone implementation, which were particularly large in Rwanda. The large scope of the safe zone meant that there was less than one troop per square mile of the safe zone, and there were 1.5 troops per one thousand individuals in the area.²⁰⁰ The general rule for military interventions and operations is, at a minimum, a troop density of 20 soldiers to every 1,000 individuals.²⁰¹ It is important to note here that there is no information readily available on why the French sent so few troops and such improper armaments, especially to establish such a large safe zone in an area already home to over a million individuals, not all of whom were civilians, and not all of whom were Tutsi. Some lines of scholarship suggest that French soldiers were more improperly armed than poorly armed because they had armaments conducive to war fighting instead of providing humanitarian aid.²⁰² However, if French intentions were actually martial and revolved around aiding the Hutus in regaining power, what would justify the small number of soldiers the French sent? While perhaps these assertions could explain the situation with the French armaments, they cannot explain the low number of French soldiers. Ultimately, it is likely that the small force was due to French political will; that number was all the nation could muster the will to send, and perhaps, a year before the events of Bosnia proved how many soldiers were truly necessary to protect a safe zone, France convinced itself that such a small number of troops would somehow be able to accomplish the task at hand. Indeed, the French suggestion to the UN to send a large number of well-armed troops to hold the safe zone in Bosnia occurred after

²⁰⁰ Kuperman, *Limits*, 49.

²⁰¹ John McGrath, *Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 1956), 94.

²⁰² Hazel Cameron, "The French Connection: Complicity in the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," *African Security* 8, no. 2 (June 2015): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2015.1036669>.

Operation Turquoise. Perhaps France was either ignorant of the true challenges its soldiers would face with implementing the safe zone in Rwanda, or it was overcome with hubris that only a force of that size was needed to achieve French goals for the conflict.

The French forces feared violence, and that consideration informed numerous aspects of their behavior. They let Hutus into the safe zone and allowed those already within the area to stay. The French forces did not stop looting and violence within the safe zone, either amongst groups or between them, out of fear that they themselves would face harm. Those fears are notably not irrational, coming from forces outnumbered literally one thousand to one. Ultimately, the French chose to allow the Hutu government, army, and militias to flee to Zaire as a method of keeping relative peace in the safe zone.²⁰³ While French actions may have aligned with concerns that France would support the Hutus, they also aligned with the very real and present threat of violence. Heavily outmanned and outnumbered, the most logical action the French could have taken was allowing Hutus into the safe zone and eventually allowing them to flee the area. While letting these Hutus flee into Zaire allowed them to avoid revenge killings and eventually trials, letting them flee also aided the French in keeping relative peace in a very tenuous situation.

It is additionally important to discuss how keeping the safe zone open to all individuals was justified by the specific mandates of OT, both as set forth in Resolution 929 and by the self-imposed French mandate. While it may seem absurd that France let Hutu militias and Hutu extremist government officials into its safe zone, those actions are required by impartiality and neutrality. Expecting French forces to only offer safety to one group would actually undermine impartiality and neutrality. It is, however, important to also note that had they had a motive to

²⁰³ Kuperman, *Limits*, 50.

harbor Hutus, French forces could have done so under the protection of impartiality and neutrality. These observations are not meant to argue that French actions were or were not just, or that they did or did not follow a mandate, but rather to point out the disparity between international legal frameworks and the reality of conflict. The question of impartiality and neutrality is interesting in most cases of safe zone usage, but these questions are particularly powerful in the context of Rwanda. The specific safe zone implemented during the genocide was so strongly plagued by issues of impartiality and neutrality because the group the safe zone was created to protect quickly became the dominant group in the conflict. The former aggressor group became the target, and large numbers of Hutus were being pushed toward the safe zone by the military front.

Ultimately, French inability to save more Tutsis either by gathering them in safer areas or by policing violence within the safe zone was a failure of the French to actualize their mandate as the intervening force. Had the French had appropriate interests and will to either execute a smaller, more effective safe zone, or to have mobilized a larger, better-armed force, they perhaps could have avoided these failures. Additionally, with those better resources, perhaps they could have repelled fleeing Hutus or stopped Hutus within the safe area from fleeing into Zaire. As it played out, however, the French did not have much of a choice but to let them enter and to eventually let them flee. To view those acts solely as in line with French affinity toward the Hutu regime is to misunderstand the problem at hand; these decisions were made first and foremost from a weak tactical position, with survival in mind.

While the safe zone itself was not a massive failure, it is impossible to know what would have happened had the war lasted longer. If the RPF had not already been winning decisively when the French began the safe zone, the conflict could have played out very differently. If the

interim government or Hutu militias had been stronger, France's inability to enforce or police the safe zone could have been disastrous. It is additionally unclear what would have happened if the Hutu extremists won the conflict, and France was in control of a concentrated group of Tutsis. While it is not valuable to consider hypotheticals with the goal of actually reaching answers, the aim of posing these questions is to emphasize how treacherous the situation in Rwanda was, and, in a broader sense, how treacherous it is to create safe zones without well-armed, appropriately manned groups protecting them. Ultimately, not only do safe zone have a slew of practical and structural problems associated with them, but they can create a large moral hazard for the international community in addition to the intervening body. The system is such that the UN legitimized the intervention of an actor with potentially nefarious motives.

Lastly, it is important to note two aspects of the Rwandan genocide to offer a full picture of the conflict. The first is that, underlying the success of Rwanda's post-conflict nation-building, old wounds still fester. In December of 2017, the Rwandan government released a report naming France complicit in the genocide.²⁰⁴ The report states, "that French military forces trained their Rwandan counterparts, supplied them with weapons even after an arms embargo, and gave cover, under the auspices of a United Nations-sanctioned humanitarian mission, in the last moments of a genocidal campaign."²⁰⁵ In 2009, Rwanda announced, "an ambitious plan to switch the entire education system to English and effectively purge the country of French as it is forced out of the workings of government."²⁰⁶ Notably, in April 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron made the groundbreaking decision to call for a report on French involvement

²⁰⁴ Jina Moore, "Rwanda Accuses France of Complicity in 1994 Genocide," *New York Times*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/world/africa/rwanda-france-genocide.html>.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ McGreal, "Adieu."

in the genocide, relying on previously sealed French archives.²⁰⁷ This report, however, is scheduled to take two years to pull together, and there should be suspicion amongst the international community as to whether the final report is sanitized or tempered. If President Macron truly had nothing to hide, and was either not afraid of what French archives would reveal, or was willing to own up to whatever material is within them, he would have made the archives open to Rwandan researchers.

Second, it is important to acknowledge and discuss the fact that sexual assault against local women (and likely men) by French forces was a prominent aspect of Operation Turquoise, as “numerous reports cite French soldiers trading sexual favors for food and medical supplies, [and] raping... Rwandan civilians.”²⁰⁸ This aspect of the conflict is vital to note because sexual violence is oftentimes forgotten in narratives of conflict and suffering, but it is a traumatic and dehumanizing form of assault that needs to be discussed. Additionally, the rape of Rwandan civilians shows an important problem with safe zones and humanitarian intervention in general; there is no one policing the police force. An intervening third party can essentially act with impunity. The parties involved in a conflict are likely too busy to begin fighting an intervening force or are incapable of doing so, and the international community is unlikely to respond in any way other than condemnation, and even then, it would likely only do so after the conflict ended. Ultimately, an intervening party has a position of power and freedom from the consequences of abusing it.

²⁰⁷ Angelique Chrisafis, “Macron asks experts to investigate French role in Rwandan genocide,” *The Guardian*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/05/macron-asks-experts-investigate-french-role-rwandan-genocide>.

²⁰⁸ Ross Conroy, “Assessment of Operation Turquoise: The Paradoxical French-led Military Intervention During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” *Real Clear Defense*, March 14, 2018, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/05/14/assessment_of_opration_turquoise_113440.html.

Case Study: Syrian Civil War

History

The civil war in Syria, now in its eighth year, is one of the most complicated and devastating conflicts of modern time. The complexity includes both the domestic actors, and also global powers including the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russia, Iran, and terrorist organizations, all with different ideologies and goals. At this point in time, the conflict has claimed the lives of 465,000 Syrians, and over twelve million citizens, roughly half of the population, have been displaced.²⁰⁹

The roots of the current civil war are found in the Arab Spring. Beginning in 2011, protests in Tunisia and later Egypt eventually ousted autocratic regimes. In the wake of such success in these two nations, citizens in countries across northern Africa and the Middle East took to the streets, hoping that similar protests could force democratic change in their own communities. In March of 2011, thousands of Syrians began protesting the arrests of several young boys who had been caught graffitiing in support of the Arab Spring; one of them, only thirteen years old, died after brutal torture.²¹⁰ While Syrians were specifically protesting the treatment of the boys, they were also protesting their autocratic president, Bashar al-Assad, and the general oppressive nature of the Syrian government. Not only was the political situation in Syria dictatorial, but Assad and most government officials were of the Alawite minority group, a branch of Shia Islam, while the majority of citizens in Syria were Sunni Muslims.²¹¹ In addition to the Arab Spring, a number of external factors also likely played a role in sparking the protests.

²⁰⁹ “Syria’s civil war explained from the beginning,” *Aljazeera*, April 14, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/syria-civil-war-explained-160505084119966.html>.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ “Syria Civil War key points,” Fordham, last updated December 31, 2016, <https://faculty.fordham.edu/davenport/Syria/Syria-History.html>.

Widespread drought, attributed by many to climate change, had plagued the nation for over three years, forcing millions of citizens into urban population centers, fueling the general sense of discontent.²¹²

Where similar outpourings of public discontent had forced governmental change in Tunisia and Egypt, Assad responded to the protests in Syria by, “by killing hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoning many more.”²¹³ While the protests and movements in Tunisia and Egypt had not been entirely peaceful, the brutality of the Assad regime was severe. In late July, following months of violence perpetrated by the Assad regime against the people, the Syrian army defected from the government, forming the Free Syrian Army.²¹⁴ The civil war truly began in the summer of 2011 between the Syrian government and the Free Syrian Army. The following months were plagued with fighting that did not seem to be going anywhere. According to Samer Abboud in *Syria*, “The militarization of the uprising— and the subsequent inability of the political or military opposition to overthrow the regime— led to the dramatic expansion of violence, the proliferation of different armed groups, and the territorial fragmentation of the country.”²¹⁵

In the face of growing violence and brutality, both between the Free Syrian Army and the Assad regime, but also leveled against innocents in population centers where fighting was taking place, concern began to grow the international community. France and Russia denounced, “the growing carnage,” the Arab League suspended Syria’s membership, and the U.S. sanctioned the nation, citing human rights abuses.²¹⁶ In early January 2012, an al-Qaeda offshoot called Jabhat

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Samer N. Abboud, *Syria* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2016), 84.

²¹⁶ David S. Sorenson, *Syria in Ruins: The Dynamics of the Syrian Civil War* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2016), 34.

al-Nusra announced their entrance into the conflict in opposition to Assad, beginning the involvement of terrorist groups in the conflict.²¹⁷ This shift allowed the Assad regime to frame their brutal attacks as fighting extremism, which additionally allowed the Syrian government to group all rebel factions together as radical terrorist groups.²¹⁸ Violence continued mounting and spreading across Syria throughout 2012, fueled by a new influx of weapons.²¹⁹ A number of ceasefires, including one organized by Kofi Annan and approved the UN Security Council, were implemented in response to the brutality of the conflict, but all of them quickly failed.²²⁰ U.S. President Obama, increasingly concerned that a desperate Assad would turn to even more horrifying military tactics, issued the famous ‘red line,’ in the same year, stating that Assad’s use of chemical weapons would be the final tipping point for American entrance into the conflict.²²¹ It is also important to note that, amidst the mounting violence, the number of Syrians fleeing the nation, namely into bordering Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, though also to European nations and other countries across the globe, began to increase heavily.

During the early days of the revolution, it became clear that opposition groups (interchangeably referred to as rebel groups) were varied and disorganized. They spanned Marxist groups, pan-Arab groups, democratic groups, Kurdish fighters, terrorist organizations, and larger, more legitimate groups such as the Free Syrian Army. It falls outside of the scope of this paper to consider all of the rebel groups and their motivations, but it is valuable to note that in the early years of the conflict, “Polyglot opposition groups formed, making them difficult to distinguish between... the anti-Assad opposition suffered from a lack of both unity and

²¹⁷ Sorenseon, *Ruins*, 35.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 36.

purpose.”²²² The constant fracturing and infighting amongst rebel groups also made it difficult for the international community to support the opposition; it was unclear which group or groups to support, or if any one group could be successful in such a splintered field. In the midst of this conflict in 2014, a new party came to the fore in Iraq and in the Syrian civil war: ISIS (interchangeably referred to as IS and ISIL). While the Islamic State, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, posed a significant threat to Assad, it also posed a significant threat to every other party in the conflict, to the Iraqi government, and to many actors in the international order. IS quickly took control of parts of central Syria, and large territories in Iraq; though it started as an al-Qaeda splinter group, the ultimate goal of IS was to create a caliphate across Syria and Iraq, and even beyond. By 2015, it was becoming increasingly unclear who was fighting for what objective, because the original conflict between Assad and the rebels had mushroomed into a conflict mired in complicated alliances and a fight against extremism. The Syrian Observatory on Human Rights reported that, by February 2015, 200,000 individuals had died, 28,277 of whom had been killed in shootings or mass executions, and a further 18,866 civilians had died in government air strikes.²²³ Syria, a once moderately wealthy country, was mired in poverty, and in many places, food and medicine had become scarce. Roughly four million Syrians were external refugees, namely in neighboring countries, including nearly 2.2 million in Turkey.²²⁴

By 2015, roughly a year after IS’s entrance into the conflict, most of the main players in the Syrian civil war had solidified. The civil war in Syria additionally became an international proxy war built on powers struggles, alliances, and an age-old conflict between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam. Turkey, for example, “has a long, porous border with Syria,” and has

²²² Sorenson, *Ruins*, 37.

²²³ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 43.

²²⁴ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 44.

denounced Assad's violence since the beginning because of the economic and political toll that Syrian refugees have on Turkey.²²⁵ Turkey, a Sunni majority nation, is additionally inclined to oppose Assad's regime on religious grounds. In terms of the fight against extremism, while Turkey did not originally have a stake in fighting terrorism within Syria, the nation increased cooperation with the U.S. to fight IS after an Islamic State suicide bombing in the Turkish city of Suruc.²²⁶ At the same time that Turkey was increasing cooperation with U.S. forces, it stopped coordinating with the People's Protection Units (YPG)— a militia comprised of Kurds from across the Middle East. Turkey stopped this coordination even though the YPG is aligned with Turkey in fighting both Assad and IS.²²⁷ Turkey cut ties with this possibly valuable ally because the Turkish government opposes the Kurds on ethnic and political grounds. Turkey has domestically battled the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for decades and believes there are ties between the PKK and the YPG.²²⁸ Turkey has even carried out bombing campaigns against Kurdish forces in Syria as they continue fighting against IS and Assad.²²⁹ While Turkey entered the conflict out of opposition to Assad on religious and practical grounds, its interest has grown to include counterterrorism considerations, both in terms of IS and the perceived threats from Kurdish militias.

The U.S., mired in the lingering effects of the economic meltdown, and still entrenched in Iraq Syndrome, was reluctant to become involved, and notably remained so even after Assad crossed Obama's 'red line' of chemical weapons use. The U.S. sought to arm and support

²²⁵ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 91.

²²⁶ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 92.

²²⁷ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 93.

²²⁸ Aaron Stein and Michelle Foley, "The YPG-PKK Connection," *Atlantic Council*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-ypg-pkk-connection>.

²²⁹ Carlotta Gall, "72 Turkish Jets Bomb U.S.-Backed Kurdish Militias in Syria," *New York Times*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/20/world/middleeast/turkey-bombs-kurds-syria.html>.

moderate rebel groups against Assad's brutal regime, but with the increasing splintering of the opposition, America remained peripherally involved.²³⁰ It was not until the rise of IS and the entrance of foes like Iran and Russia to the conflict that the U.S. had a serious interest in becoming involved. These interests span countering Russian and Iranian influence globally, and counterterrorism objectives, in addition to the U.S.'s original anti-Assad interest. To achieve these objectives, the U.S. has doubled down on funneling arms and monetary support to allies battling IS in the nation, namely Kurdish forces and the YPG in particular, putting Turkey and the U.S. at odds with each other despite the fact they are aligned in battling IS and opposing Assad.²³¹

Iran is a close Syrian ally due to its Shia majority and a "culture that includes a self-identified global responsibility to protect the interest of Middle Eastern Shia communities."²³² Iran also has vested interests in asserting its power in the region, particularly in relation to Sunni Saudi Arabia, and in countering Western influence or 'westtoxification' in the area.²³³ This idea of westtoxification relates mainly to the United States which, in addition to playing various active roles in the region and pursuing a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia, has a long and tense background with Iran. Iran also has an interest in ensuring that Syria remains an area through which it can easily funnel resources to the Shia Hezbollah in Lebanon.²³⁴ Iran began supporting the Assad regime early in the conflict for a confluence of these reasons; the nation sent funding and weapons to Syria, and additionally, "sent in experienced Iranian militia members both to train Syrian units and to engage the armed opposition."²³⁵ In *Syria in Ruins*:

²³⁰ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 99.

²³¹ Sorenson, *Syria*, 100.

²³² Sorenson, *Syria*, 101.

²³³ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 101.

²³⁴ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 102.

²³⁵ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 101.

The Dynamics of the Syrian Civil War, David Sorenson argues that it was Iranian aid and involvement in the conflict, more than any other pro-Assad actor, that helped the Syrian government forces recover from a tough position during the first few years of the conflict. Sorensen asserts that Iran has been able to have a strong effect on the conflict because of its “expertise, experience, and strategic patience.”²³⁶

Russia has an old relationship with Syria that started when the USSR began channeling money into the nation to counter U.S. power in the Middle East. Russia initially responded to the civil war in Syria with ambivalence; it called for an end to the conflict and even worked with the U.S. to stop chemical weapons usage.²³⁷ In June 2015, however, Putin clarified Russia’s stance, pledging Russian support for the Assad regime, and ramping up military assistance.²³⁸ Russia decided to more actively support the Syrian government for a variety of reasons: first, Russia fears that a defeated Assad could lead to a Syrian failed state; second, Russia needs a friend in Syria to ensure continued Russian access to its leased port on the Syrian coast; third, supporting Syria allows Russia to assert power directly against the U.S. and NATO.²³⁹ Sorenson argues that “this is the most important Russian power projection in the region in decades, and it will enhance Russia’s influence throughout the Levant.”²⁴⁰ Russia also naturally has an interest in combating IS, partially because it fears an eventual increased terrorist presence in the Caucasuses, but combating the rise and spread of terrorism in the Middle East is not the strongest motivation behind Russia’s involvement in the civil war.²⁴¹

²³⁶ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 102.

²³⁷ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 103.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 104.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 105.

Saudi Arabia is involved in the conflict first and foremost to counter Iranian power. Saudi Arabia, a Sunni majority nation, opposes the Shia Iranian regime, “arguing that its propagation of Shia Islam through its self-proclaimed Islamic Revolution [is] a threat to global Islam and that [it has] a duty to challenge Iranian influence everywhere.”²⁴² Saudi Arabia has heavily funded opposition groups since the beginning of the conflict, while additionally supporting Houthi rebels in Yemen, where the civil war has become yet another proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region.²⁴³

Israel is involved in the conflict in Syria mainly to push back against Iranian power and the threat that Hezbollah poses to Israeli security and stability. Israel also has a marginal interest in countering IS, as IS, “constantly [uses] the word ‘Jews’ in its list of the enemies it [promises] to attack,” though Iran and the Hezbollah present more immediate threats to Israel.²⁴⁴ In early 2013, Israel had already strategically bombed targets in Syria. One incident, a bombing in Damascus, targeted an Iranian general researching chemical weapons. Notably, Israel has not taken much of a stance on the Assad regime itself, despite having beaten Syria in no fewer than four wars.²⁴⁵

Hezbollah is a Lebanese militia that was “founded in the early 1980s after Israeli forces invaded Lebanon to attack Palestinian Liberation Organization forces.”²⁴⁶ Hezbollah’s influence inside of Lebanon continued to grow over the following years, giving voice to the oppressed Shia population within the country. As its power as a Shia militia and political entity grew, so did its relationship with Shia Iran. Hezbollah now has a strong relationship with Iran, which has helped

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 106.

²⁴⁴ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 107.

²⁴⁵ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 108.

²⁴⁶ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 109.

Hezbollah grow its military capacity, to the point that, “[Hezbollah] can... be understood as an extension of Iranian security policy, poised to support Iranian regional aspirations, which have included support for the Assad regime.”²⁴⁷ Hezbollah has an interest in the conflict because of its Shia roots and relationship with Iran, and also because involvement allows the group to assert power against Israel. This anti-Israeli motive is evident in the moves of both Hezbollah and Iran to establish positions in the Golan region of Syria, where the nation borders Israel.²⁴⁸

The interests of European nations, in addition to general humanitarian concern, align with U.S. interests in most ways. Europe has a vested interest in fighting IS to stop the rise of global terrorism and it additionally benefits from countering Russian influence and power. Europe would also, however, greatly gain from stopping or stemming the flow of migrants from Syria, as the refugee crisis has greatly affected European political stability.

Kurdish militias also play an important role in the war in Syria. At the beginning of the war, the Kurdish militias formed in a way similar to most rebel groups. These militias were mobilized by the opportunity to assert their identity, which had been oppressed by Assad’s regime to the point where Kurdish political parties had been banned since the 1970s.²⁴⁹ Following the outbreak of the civil war, Kurdish militias established several “predominantly Kurdish regions, home to roughly two million Kurds,” within Syria.²⁵⁰ Kurdish militias, primarily the YPG, later joined forces with the U.S. coalition to battle IS, motivated to win back IS-occupied Kurdish territory. The main goal of the Kurds, however, is not extinguishing IS, but rather regaining Kurdish territory. Kurdish officials in Syria argue that their ultimate goal is

²⁴⁷ Sorenson, *Ruins*, 110.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Adam Baczko, Gilles Dorronsoro, and Arthur Quesnay, *Civil War in Syria: Mobilization and Competing Social Orders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 166.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

regional autonomy for Kurds in Syria. In this vein, though the Assad government persecuted the Kurds prior to the war, the two groups have stayed largely out of each other's way. A YPG commander even told Reuters that the group would not protest Assad's regime if he agreed to respect Kurdish autonomy within their territories.

The main interest of the Syrian government, and Assad at its helm, is simply to survive. All of the individual actors it has let join the conflict or even asked to join the conflict, are strategic allies to help the Syrian government win. Additionally, though the Syrian government maintains dislike of the Kurds as an ethnic group, it has aided Kurdish fighters in their conflict with Turkey, allowing them to pass freely through government-held territories.²⁵¹ While Syria seems willing to work with the Kurds in service of this shared anti-Turkey objective, the Syrian government remains reluctant to agree to the autonomy of Kurdish regions.²⁵² The Syrian government has also ruthlessly profited from ISIS's entrance into the conflict; Assad knows that the international community prioritizes beating ISIS over ending his regime and that if it were to come to it, the international community would choose Assad over the Islamic State. Secure in that knowledge, Assad has stood back and allowed the international community and opposition to battle ISIS, expending precious resources and willpower. The Syrian regime, in contrast, continues trade with IS-held areas, mainly as it relates to oil.²⁵³ It is also important to reiterate the lengths to which the Assad regime is willing to go to in order to win the civil war. The Assad regime has used chemical weapons against its own people and shown no regret or sympathy

²⁵¹ Laila Bassam and Tom Perry, "Friend or Foe? Assad quietly aids Syrian Kurds against Turkey," *Reuters*, February 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-kurds/friend-or-foe-assad-quietly-aids-syrian-kurds-against-turkey-idUSKBN1FV078>.

²⁵² "Where do the Kurds fit into Syria's War?" *Reuters*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-explainer/where-do-the-kurds-fit-into-syrias-war-idUSKCN1OX16L>.

²⁵³ Aryn Baker, "Why Bashar Assad Won't Fight ISIS," *Time*, February 26, 2015, <http://time.com/3719129/assad-isis-asset/>.

toward the hundreds of thousands of people, many of them civilians, killed in the civil war, nor the millions of refugees forced to flee domestically or internationally.

The other two important forces in the war are IS itself, and the various other rebel groups. IS is not related to Assad or the Syrian civil war; it is an organization with its own aims and goals that seized upon the civil war to take territory in Syria. With Assad and the other military groups engaged in chaotic fighting, IS succeeded in taking large swaths of land. IS did not change the nature of the Syrian civil war necessarily, though it added another layer of conflict to the already complex situation. Some actors became involved in the war to battle IS, while others remained strictly interested in supporting or fighting against Assad, and others even were interested in both objectives simultaneously. Additionally, some actors such as Russia support Assad but channel resources toward fighting ISIS; others such as Israel are primarily interested in conflict with Iran and Hezbollah, two subgroups of the conflict, and not particularly interested in Assad or IS.

It is also important to note that all of the various rebel groups are important actors in this conflict. They are numerous, splintered, and in search of very different objectives. It falls outside of the scope of this paper to discuss more actors than those main groups considered above, but it is important to note for a full understanding of the scenario that hundreds of separate rebel groups, some valuable in the fight against IS, and others involved in the proxy war, add to the quagmire of Syria.

In 2015, all of these actors were involved in varying ways in the conflict, and the civil war had come to a standstill. In response to the stagnation, Russia carried out its first airstrikes

in the country, claiming to target IS, but actually targeting anti-Assad rebel groups.²⁵⁴ Late in the same year, and with thanks to the help of external actors, Assad's forces started to regain territory, including the major population center of Homs.²⁵⁵ In 2016, bolstered by Russian airpower and Iranian assistance, Assad's forces also regained control of Aleppo. During the same time period, Turkey increased on-the-ground involvement against IS, but also against Kurdish militia groups. Concurrent to Turkish operations against the YPG, the U.S. was channeling money and weapons to Kurdish militia groups, hoping they would aid the U.S. objective of vanquishing IS.²⁵⁶ In early 2017, President Donald Trump undertook his first action involving Syria, bombing an army base as a reprisal for chemical weapons attacks by Assad against opposition forces and civilians.²⁵⁷ Only a few months later, U.S.-backed YPG members, in concert with other opposition forces, began to make serious headway against IS fighters, and in the fall of 2017, IS was pushed out of its former stronghold at Raqqa.²⁵⁸

By July of 2018, Assad and his allies had recaptured most territory in the country, and by early 2019, Kurdish militias had forced IS out of their last stronghold in Syria. Trump announced intentions to remove U.S. troops from the country in response to this seeming defeat of IS in Syria, and he issued a series of threats to Turkey, offering penalties and retribution if Turkish forces continued to target Kurds.²⁵⁹ The last obstacle remaining between the Syrian government and victory is the city of Idlib, a stronghold for rebel groups, though mainly for Haya't Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an al-Qaeda affiliate. An estimated three million civilians have taken shelter in the

²⁵⁴ "Syria profile- Timeline," *BBC News*, January 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

city, most of them internally displaced citizens. Russia and Turkey reached the Sochi Agreement in September of 2018, to establish a demilitarized zone in and surrounding Idlib. The agreement, “dictated that heavy weapons, tanks, rocket systems and mortars of all opposition groups would be withdrawn by October 10, and the zone [would] be monitored by coordinated Turkish and Russian patrols.”²⁶⁰ The aim of the agreement was that Turkey and Russia, and their allies would avoid military conflict in Idlib until Turkey could convince HTS rebels and other ‘radical’ groups to leave Idlib.²⁶¹ The ultimate idea was that, once the main rebel groups had left the city, some other agreement could be reached that settled the offensive while attempting to mitigate devastation, particularly for civilians. Turkey was motivated to reach the Sochi Agreement out of fear that, should a full Russian-Syrian offensive occur, many of these civilians in Idlib would flee to Turkey. In reaching this agreement, however, Turkey did not say how it planned to convince radical groups to leave the city, and additionally did not even define exactly what it meant by ‘radical’ groups. Russia agreed to the demilitarized zone to avoid massive humanitarian fallout if possible. Ultimately, with Idlib standing as the last rebel stronghold in Syria, conflict in the city was inevitable but not pressing.

However, as foreseen when the agreement began in September of 2018, Turkey has made no appreciable progress in convincing radical rebel groups to vacate the city. There is simply no reason for rebel groups to do so, and Turkey does not have many tools at its disposal to force their departure. Over the following months, as nothing appeared to be happening, the international community became increasingly wary that the demilitarized zone was a stalling act, rather than a tangible step toward avoiding conflict in Idlib. Concurrently, in early 2019 on the

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Maria Tsvetkova, “Russia and Turkey agree to create buffer zone in Syria’s Idlib,” *Reuters*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-putin-erdogan-hope/russia-and-turkey-agree-to-create-buffer-zone-in-syrias-idlib-idUSKCN1LX1BU>.

heels of Trump's announcement that U.S. forces would be leaving Syria, Erdogan started calling for the creation of a safe zone. Trump announced via Twitter that U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria would include the creation of a safe zone. The tweet read, "starting the long overdue pullout from Syria while hitting the little remaining ISIS territorial caliphate hard, and from many directions. Will attack again from existing nearby base if it reforms. Will devastate Turkey economically if they hit Kurds. Create 20 mile safe zone...."²⁶²

Turkey wants a safe zone to protect its border from an influx of refugees should Idlib fall. Additionally, such a safe zone would ensure that Kurdish forces do not encroach upon Turkish territory following U.S. troop withdrawal and the eventual end of the conflict. It is, however, not clear why the U.S. wants a safe zone outside of obvious humanitarian concerns, though some reports suggest the safe zone would only be for Kurds.²⁶³ That notion raises additional concerns; namely, which Kurds would be allowed, and whether the current Kurdish regions would be encapsulated within it. It is also unclear why Trump believes that Kurds would choose to enter the safe zone instead of taking their chances fighting, given their military prowess and martial culture. Turkey has also suggested that the creation of a buffer zone or safe zone on Syria's border with Turkey could create an opportunity to repatriate the Syrian refugees inside of Turkey.²⁶⁴ Turkey has also not clarified whether the proposed zone would be a safe zone or a buffer zone, as both phrases have been used.²⁶⁵ The

²⁶² Donald Trump, Twitter post, January 2019, 2:53 p.m., https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1084584259510304768?fbclid=IwAR2s9rOPQ8k6a0z3TtMUBxjAsboMGcjNch_E-FiHhYaFWlz-6aoU7MvTliQ.

²⁶³ Sara Plana, "Trump wants a safe zone in Syria. Is that even possible?" *Washington Post*, January 24, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/01/24/what-are-the-military-requirements-for-a-safe-zone-in-syria/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d0e55f1676bf.

²⁶⁴ Amberin Zaman, "Erdogan hints at progress on Syrian safe zone," *Al-Monitor*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/erdogan-claims-syria-safe-zone-trump.html?fbclid=IwAR2Ggy3jF1ZE9p3EqtaLgvHr3Bzh9ulCkcI4r8r45pu9XTXtc9T5mLGu5W4#ixzz5gZO3rgaW>.

²⁶⁵ Plana, "Trump."

difference between a safe zone and a buffer zone is a vital concern for humanitarian, military, and political purposes. As opposed to a safe zone, a buffer zone is, as the U.S. military defines, “[an] area controlled by a peace operations force... formed to create an area of separation between disputing or belligerent forces and reduce the risk of renewed conflict.”²⁶⁶ A buffer zone is first and foremost a military undertaking, whereas a safe zone is a humanitarian tool.

The U.S. and Turkey are in contact regarding the creation of a safe zone, but the actors have not reached any conclusions. U.S. Syria envoy James Jeffrey (a position officially entitled the Secretary’s Special Representative for Syria Engagement) is set to travel to Turkey, “soon... to try to iron out the details of its safe-zone proposal.”²⁶⁷ Turkey demands involvement in the control of whatever zone is implemented and refuses to allow Kurds to enter it.²⁶⁸ Accordingly, Erdogan has even threatened that Turkey can undertake the safe zone by itself if needed.²⁶⁹ So far, the U.S. has refused to cut ties with the YPG but is reluctant to agree to a safe zone that does not allow YPG members inside of it.²⁷⁰ The U.S. is wavering in its commitment to Kurdish forces, as the relationship between the two actors was built mainly on fighting IS, a force which is at least momentarily subdued. The U.S. additionally has no interest in staying in the conflict, which would mean the U.S. would not play a large role in implementing the safe area. To remedy this problem, the U.S. has tried to

²⁶⁶ Lionel Beehner and Gustav Meibauer, “The Futility of Buffer Zones in International Politics,” *Orbit* 60, no. 2 (January 2016): 250, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2016.01.004>.

²⁶⁷ “Syrian Kurds fear US sellout to Turkey on ‘safe zone,’” *Al-Monitor*, April 19, 2019, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/04/syria-kurds-fear-us-sellout-turkey-safe-zone-zarif-erdogan.html?fbclid=IwAR3EwQQqYm_e_q5xkdfbZ4wovi5v1IUGhRzb6lXZje1PrDazCDPuRYG5Jpo#ixzz5IYYs_dUU0.

²⁶⁸ Zeynep Bilginsoy, “Erdogan: Turkey can go it alone to establish Syria safe zone,” *AP News*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/06c62c64fe2c434886e26d96e932d813>.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ “Kurds,” *Aljazeera*.

convince European nations to send troops to undertake the safe zone. It is unclear whether Trump means for the safe area to be undertaken in concert with Turkey, or independent from the nation, though it also is not particularly important, as European nations have thus far refused to send troops.²⁷¹

Jeffrey said, “in terms of the Kurds, what we’re working with is with Turkey to have a safe zone of some length along the Turkish border where there would be no YPG forces, because Turkey feels very nervous about the YPG and their ties to the PKK.”²⁷² Jeffrey later added, “We also do not want anyone mishandling our SDF partners, some of whom are Kurds. And so therefore, we’re working for a solution that will meet everybody’s needs.” Notably, Russia argues that any safe zone would need to be approved by Assad.²⁷³ A Russian spokesperson asserted, “The question of the presence of a military contingent acting on the authority of a third country on the territory of a sovereign country and especially Syria must be decided directly by Damascus.”²⁷⁴ The Syrian government opposes the creation of safe zones by another actor, citing sovereignty and unity concerns.²⁷⁵

In the meantime, while the U.S. and Turkey have been fighting over a proposed safe zone that appears to revolve around the Kurds and Turkish interest, the situation in Idlib has deteriorated greatly. Turkey was unable to convince any of the radical rebel groups to leave the

²⁷¹ “Intel: Why US plan to have Europeans run Syria safe zone is no sure bet,” *Al-Monitor*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/01/intel-why-us-plan-europeans-run-syria-safe-zone.html?fbclid=IwAR2FzBj33hus3CAOkbdmnTkFpyCxq1SY9EciSYyeWuc4izMJSFmi5GGEEVA#ixzz5eDFcPLf1>.

²⁷² Amberin Zaman, “Syrian Kurds remain wary of US plan for Turkish safe zone,” *Al-Monitor*, March 26, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/03/syrian-kurds-oppose-safe-zone-turkish-forces.html#ixzz5kRr360jC>.

²⁷³ Zaman, “Erdogan.”

²⁷⁴ “Russia: Turkey needs Syria’s consent before setting up safe zone,” *Aljazeera*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/russia-turkey-syria-consent-setting-safe-zone-190214113021815.html>.

²⁷⁵ “Assad Said to Reject Safe Zones in Syria,” *VOA News*, February 10, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/syria-assad-safe-zones/3718096.html>.

city, and Russian and Syrian patience has worn thin. Beginning in early April, Russian and Syrian forces began shelling Idlib.²⁷⁶ By mid-April, the shelling had not yet risen to the level of full conflict, but the resumption of violence is concerning.²⁷⁷ It appears to only be a matter of time until the full battle for Idlib begins. In the meantime, not much has been done to improve the situation for the civilians taking refuge in the city.

Analysis

The safe zone, as proposed, would help Turkey protect its border from Kurds and oust Kurds from their current territory in Syria. It would also create a buffer zone between Turkey's border and possible refugee outflows from Idlib, and additionally allow Turkey to repatriate the roughly four million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey. The safe zone could also fulfill the European objective of stemming refugee flows, though Europe has thus far been unwilling to play a role in the action. President Trump supports the creation of a safe area, but not under Turkey's parameters. The U.S. does not want to accept a safe area that rejects Kurds and additionally does not want to agree to leaving Turkey with sole enforcement power for the area of security. It is also unclear what President Trump intends to accomplish with the safe zone. He could mean for the safe zone to be solely for Kurds to ensure their safety after U.S. troop withdrawal for counterterrorism purposes. President Trump could also intend to protect Syrian civilians in concert with Kurds, to save face following the U.S.'s exit from the conflict. Trump's motivations remain opaque, possibly because the administration does not actually have goals for the policy, or at least does not have goals yet, and questions linger.

²⁷⁶ "Syrian army shelling kills at least a dozen in rebel-held Idlib," *Aljazeera*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/syrian-army-shelling-kills-dozen-rebel-held-idlib-190404143945666.html>.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

The interests of other actors in the conflict complicate, rather than illuminate, these questions. Russia maintains that Syria has to approve of any Turkish safe zone, namely because of the consequences Turkish control of Syrian territory could have. The Syrian government remains opposed to this idea. It is a slippery slope to allow the Turkish government to place ground troops in a section of Syrian territory, even if Turkish motivations seem to involve the Kurds and not Assad's regime. None of the other important actors in the conflict, mainly the rebel groups, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Hezbollah, have commented on the creation of a safe zone in northeastern Turkey. The lack of input on the parts of these actors is, naturally, tied to their motivations and interests. The few remaining rebels (excluding the Kurds) are locked in a war with the Syrian government and its allies that the rebels are going to lose. The groups are focused mainly on these last battles; the territorial position of the Kurds is of no interest to other rebel groups, as the Kurds are not really battling Assad. Additionally, the rebel groups' wishes regarding civilians and civilian safety are unclear. While rebel groups could have an interest in civilian safety, the groups could also view a civilian presence in conflict zones as a positive. Civilian presence buffers rebel groups, if marginally, from the Syrian government and its allies. This observation is clear in the Russian and Turkish implementation of the demilitarized zone at Idlib. The large civilian presence in the city, in concert with other considerations, bought the rebel groups a significant amount of time. At the very least, the rebel groups have larger concerns than the immediate implementation of the safe zone, and how it would or would not affect Kurds and civilians.

Iran and Hezbollah, for their parts, are in the conflict solely to support Assad and project power both as actors and as Shia entities. They have succeeded so far and stand to

ultimately win the conflict as soon as Idlib falls. In simple terms: Iran and Hezbollah have already won everything they set out to fight for. There is no reason for either group to expand their involvement into the questions of safe zones, Kurds, and civilians. Both actors could have an interest in helping Assad combat Kurdish forces should they retain Syrian territory following the war, however, there is not an avenue currently available for either Iran or Hezbollah to pursue those goals. Countering the Kurds in Syria at this moment in time would mean supporting Sunni Turkey. Similarly, Saudi Arabia has no particular interest in the Kurds or civilians, either in Idlib or repatriated to Syria. Saudi Arabia is an opposition supporter for both religious and political reasons, but has clearly accepted Assad winning the war. This is clear through a lack of increased Saudi military involvement aimed to counter the Syrian government's slow march to victory. Saudi Arabia both has no interest in addressing the safe zone problem and also stands to gain nothing from it. This consideration of the interests of actors in the conflict further highlights that the main players in question are Kurdish militias, Turkey, the U.S., and the Syrian government and Russia more peripherally.

Notably, the only Kurdish interest is retaining territory in Syria following the war. Erdogan's obsession with the Kurds is entirely self-serving. He has manufactured a Kurdish threat to bolster his political power and popularity and to stoke Turkish nationalism. It should also be clarified that the Kurds are not passive actors in these considerations. They are an organized group with numerous, powerful militias who have been battling IS in Syria for years. Additionally, many Kurdish militias are well-armed with American weapons. The

YPG, and its partner militia, the all-female YPJ, had roughly 60,000 soldiers in 2017.²⁷⁸ For reference, U.S. troop deployment peaked at 100,000 in Afghanistan, a significantly larger area than the Kurdish-controlled northeastern corner of Syria.²⁷⁹ These observations complicate the idea that the U.S. would need a safe zone to protect Kurds from Turkey; even if the safe zone was comprised of only Kurdish civilians, why could they not just shelter behind Kurdish lines? Would the Kurds fight Turkish offensives in a different area than the safe zone? What if the safe zone is in the heart of Kurdish territory? Or fighting around the safe zone, but with international troops protecting a collection of Syrian Kurds in the middle of the fighting? Again, there are no answers available to these questions yet, but they are worth raising to gain a better understanding of the obstacles of the safe zone plan suggested by the U.S.

Additionally, while Turkey has more military power than the Kurds, and could and would beat the Kurds in a conflict, it is unreasonable to expect that the Kurds would not put up a fight. If the Kurds fought against IS to regain their territory, it is very likely they would do the same against Turkish forces. There would very likely be a large-scale conflict between Kurdish and Turkish forces within Syria should Turkey co-opt Kurdish territory for a safe area.

It is also important to discuss how the interests of the actors involved informs willingness to overcome challenges in safe zone implementation. It is clear that Turkey's interests are large and inform a large amount of will. The problem with Turkish will,

²⁷⁸ Tom Perry, "Exclusive: Syrian Kurdish YPG aims to expand force to over 100,000," *Reuters*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-ypg-exclusive/exclusive-syrian-kurdish-ypg-aims-to-expand-force-to-over-100000-idUSKBN16R1QS>.

²⁷⁹ "A Timeline of U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan since 2001," *Military Times*, July 6, 2016, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2016/07/06/a-timeline-of-u-s-troop-levels-in-afghanistan-since-2001/>.

however, is that it has nothing to do with safe zones or humanitarian aims. It is unclear how Turkish will to battle the Kurds, and Turkey's desire to push them out of their current territory, could translate into the creation of a properly implemented safe zone. Not only is the Turkish idea of countering the Kurds through the use of a safe zone built on flawed reasoning, but Turkish attempts to achieve a military objective through this safe zone would be problematic. It would be problematic because, as proposed, this safe area would protect four million repatriated Syrian civilians. The repatriated Syrians would presumably later be joined by whatever number of individuals can flee Idlib, or choose to do so once the fighting begins in earnest.

Turkey has a vested interest in finding a way to remove destabilizing Syrian refugees from within its borders. This willingness would theoretically motivate Turkey to implement a successful safe zone so as to avoid Syrians fleeing back into Turkey. However, Turkey views the safe area first and foremost as a tactical tool in its war against the Kurds. Implementing the safe zone in Kurdish territory to force Kurds out of the border region will lead to full-scale conflict between Turkish and Kurdish forces. This conflict is likely to revolve around the territory Turkey has taken from the Kurds; this territory is necessarily the safe zone. During this full-scale conflict, Turkish military interests will trump Turkish willingness to ensure the continued safety of the repatriated refugees.

Essentially, Turkey's current plan will put millions of innocent people at ground zero of a serious conflict between the Turkish government and Kurdish militias. Additionally, there is the compounding factor of Assad's opposition to a safe area, and Russia's steadfast support of the Syrian government. It cannot be known how Syria and Russia would respond to these Turkish actions. Ultimately, while much of this remains unknown, it is clear that

Turkey's real goal is countering Kurdish power, and that attempting to achieve that goal through the avenue of a safe zone would not only be unsuccessful, but could also harm a large number of civilians.

The U.S. and the international community as a whole also face a moral hazard. The U.S. has an interest in protecting the Kurds, though it is marginal for two reasons. First, the immediate threat that created the partnership, IS, has lessened greatly. The U.S. would theoretically have an interest in maintaining close ties with the Kurds to fight the possible reemergence of IS. However, given Trump's announcement that IS has been, "one hundred percent defeated," the likelihood of maintained U.S.-Kurdish relations for counterterrorism purposes is low.²⁸⁰ Second, the U.S. has a history of flip-flopping on support for Kurdish forces across the Middle East. While Kurds have been valuable partners for the U.S. in various scenarios, the U.S. has also historically had few qualms in abandoning Kurdish partnerships. A prominent example of such U.S. behavior has already been covered in the northern Iraq case study. The U.S. chose to continue arming Hussein's regime with chemical weapons to use against Iran, despite the fact that (ignoring the illegality and immorality of chemical weapons) Hussein was also using those weapons to target U.S.-allied Kurdish forces and Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq. Through understanding that U.S. commitment to the Kurds is marginal, or at least easily abandoned, it becomes clear that the U.S.'s actual interest is in *appearing* to untangle itself responsibly from Syria. The U.S. wants to save face internationally after its proclamation of a hasty withdrawal. Trying to ensure that the Kurds are left in a good position achieves that goal. So does, however, supporting Turkey in the

²⁸⁰ Chris Lister, "Trump Says ISIS is Defeated. Reality Says Otherwise," *Politico*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/03/18/trump-isis-terrorists-defeated-foreign-policy-225816>.

creation of a safe zone. This analysis shows that the best way to actually protect the Kurds is to ensure Erdogan avoids targeting them. However, that is not the course of action the Trump administration has taken. While Trump's original tweet suggesting a "20 mile safe zone..." also threatened economic repercussions for Turkish actions against the Kurds, the dialogue has since softened.²⁸¹ With a physical meeting between Turkish and American officials forthcoming, the U.S. is maintaining opposition to some aspects of Erdogan's current plan but has not pursued any methods to ensure Turkey does not undertake operations that would affect Kurdish populations. The U.S. has not issued serious threats, even in response to Erdogan's proclamations that Turkey can and will implement its safe zone plan alone. Instead, *Al-Monitor* reports that Jeffrey, "is willing to consider a safe zone inside Syria on the Turkish border that would include a limited number of Turkish forces but that is free of the People's Protection Units."²⁸²

The fact that U.S. diplomats seem willing to work with Turkey to create a safe zone, even one that excludes Kurds, is evidence of the moral hazard problem in this scenario. The U.S., as discussed, has an interest to be appearing to do something to mitigate the negative effects of its withdrawal. This interest of *appearing* to do something could manifest in *actually* doing something, but if there is an opportunity to support another actor in its undertaking, the U.S. will likely choose to do so. Regardless of moral realities, supporting another actor will achieve the U.S.'s goal of appearing to take action, while avoiding the effort, risk, and money of actually implementing a policy. Ultimately, the U.S. and other

²⁸¹ Trump, Twitter post.

²⁸² "Kurds," *Al-Monitor*.

international actors are flirting with supporting Turkish actions even though they will, if executed, inevitably result in harm.

While all of these dynamics are playing out, the tenuous demilitarization agreement in Idlib is crumbling, and no actor has taken steps to address the crisis. Russia and Syria agreeing to the demilitarized zone in Idlib signals their willingness to at least come to the table for humanitarian negotiations. The international community could even pursue something as simple and low stakes as a humanitarian corridor. The actors involved in the conflict could agree to a few days where civilians could leave the city in safety. The international community would not even have to commit to giving anything to the civilians after they left the city. Simply offering them a safe way to flee would be a better option than any they currently have.

Ultimately, the framework set forth by the literature review of this paper, and the conclusions explored in each of the previous case studies, all point toward the question of safe zones failing in this scenario. Turkey's interests in creating the safe zone are impure and should raise serious red flags as to future full-scale military conflict between Turkey and the Kurds, which would likely have massive humanitarian consequences. Additionally, the international community has not been, at large, appropriately wary of Turkey's call for safe zones. The international community's lack of caution is related to the moral hazard Turkish actions would create. On their surface, these proposed actions could be understood to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Lastly, any moves by Turkey or the U.S. regarding a safe zone risk further inflaming conflict with Russia and Syria, and waste precious time and resources that could be channeled toward finding a way to save as many civilian lives in Idlib as possible.

Conclusion

Safe zones are such an appealing tool; they conjure grand notions of returning civility to war zones. In a bleak world increasingly mired in conflict that harms innocent individuals, the concept of a knight in shining armor— whether it be an international organization, a multinational coalition, or a single actor— entering a conflict to return dignity and safety to vulnerable individuals has strong allure. Not only can this entity join the conflict with these pure, positive intentions in mind, but the actor can implement a simple safe zone, an area of security where individuals at risk can shelter and have adequate basic resources. The actor can achieve this without having any sort of larger effect on the conflict because the actor is, after all, impartial and neutral. The safe area remains a shining beacon of safety and civility, and all of the parties in the conflict avoid it out of humanitarian respect. Ultimately, this is a beautiful, compelling idea that plays on very real human heartstrings. Though most of the analysis in this paper is cynical about the intentions of actors and the outcomes of their undertakings, this paper is not cynical about the genuine empathy of most people. Faced with the surplus of violence and sadness in the world, most individuals feel genuine pain and genuine heartache. When these individuals read about safe zones in the newspaper, or hear politicians calling for safe zones in conflict areas they have seen covered in brutal news segments, it is natural to want them to be used and to be used widely. Safe zones, grounded in their very name, appear to offer a simple, positive solution to humanitarian crises.

These are the very reasons safe zones need to be discussed. They sound so positive, and so many people with genuinely good intentions support them. However, they directly caused the death of 8,000 innocent boys and men in Srebrenica. The UN entered the war in Bosnia and established the safe zone at Srebrenica with only good intentions, but it did not

understand the dangers of this chosen policy, and its actions gathered tens of thousands of innocent individuals into a physically vulnerable place. Safe zones, if the international community does not wake up to their dangers, could be the cause of humanitarian disaster for literally millions of Syrian refugees. It is important to understand this negative side of safe zones because the international community, in attempting to make conditions better for individuals experiencing extreme hardship and danger, can make their situations infinitely worse. Additionally, actors with bad intentions can easily use the existing system to pursue self-serving policies with negative humanitarian effects.

The four cases studied above validate the proposed framework as a useful tool for deconstructing humanitarian interventions, and the use of safe zones in particular. The four very different cases can all be broken down to their components through a discussion of interest. Why specifically does an individual actor want to undertake an intervention? The framework then considers will. Based on why an actor wants to undertake this intervention, what can be known about its willingness to mobilize troops? How willing is this actor to organize and execute the practical aspects of the mission? Based on this understanding of interest and willingness, the framework explores success. If the actor chooses intervention despite lacking appropriate interest and levels of willingness, what is the outcome? Lastly, when looking at all of these factors together, the framework discusses moral hazard. What role did moral hazard play in not only the decisions of the actor to intervene, but also in the decisions of the international community to support or not support the intervention?

It is clear in these cases that it is very unlikely that an actor possesses adequate interest to implement a safe zone successfully. It is impossible for an actor to have adequate willingness to overcome the challenges of the safe zone without a large interest in the

conflict. Without the willingness to overcome these challenges, the likelihood of the intervening force mobilizing and deploying an adequate force to actually undertake the safe zone is null. The cases of Srebrenica and Rwanda show how a lack of interest on the part of the intervenor informs a low willingness to address challenges. This low willingness inevitably manifests in an inadequate number of poorly armed troops. In both of these cases, the safe zones did not remain safe for all of the vulnerable individuals within them.

On the other hand, the only case of a successfully implemented safe zone discussed was northern Iraq. Actors across the multinational coalition had adequate interest in intervention, which informed a willingness to address and overcome the challenges of the situation. The result was a robust, well-armed force creating and protecting an effective safe zone. However, as discussed, this willingness to overcome challenges was only great enough because the challenges in the case of northern Iraq were artificially low. These challenges were artificially low due to the fortuitous circumstances of the intervention. Additionally, while this analysis shows that successful safe zones are theoretically possible to undertake, that can only happen with high interest, high willingness, and the mobilization of appropriate means to overcome challenges. This could have been the case for the Turkish safe zone in Syria; Turkey has a very high national security and economic interest in repatriating Syrian refugees. That interest could have theoretically informed a willingness to undertake the safe zone correctly. However, Turkish calls for a safe zone are tied up in a military and political struggle against the Kurds, removing the possibility of creating a successful humanitarian space.

Despite this set of observations and facts, safe zones persist as a commonly called-for tool of humanitarian intervention because they create a moral hazard for various actors in

various ways. The international community views safe zones incorrectly to be a form of humanitarian intervention that requires less effort and commitment than other forms. This belief is grounded in the fact that most other forms of humanitarian or diplomatic intervention require addressing the root cause of a conflict, where safe zones can be a Band-Aid on the conflict's effects. However, as this analysis suggests, the lack of interest that led the actor to choose implementing a safe zone over other forms of intervention in the first place will inevitably manifest in the safe zone. Despite these facts and the brutal history of safe zones, the international community continues buying into safe zones because of this moral hazard. Cynically, actors ignore these objective truths because safe zones continue to offer them a way to intervene that is fairly cost-effective. If the actor has a greater interest in appearing to address a conflict than it does in actually addressing the conflict, safe zones remain an attractive option. Less cynically, even in the face of all of this evidence, many international actors still believe that safe zones can work, and undertake them as a cost-effective tool of intervention in good faith. Additionally, there is no incentive for other actors in the international community to vocally oppose an actor implementing a safe zone. Another actor intervening in a conflict, even one with bad intentions or obviously lacking adequate means, creates a moral hazard for the international community as a whole. If the international community supports the actor's intervention, other actors in the international community are absolved of pressure to intervene themselves.

The application of this framework to these cases makes it clear that there are serious structural problems with safe zones. The first problem is that states and actors will essentially never have adequate interests and will to undertake humanitarian intervention responsibly and well. This argument is both the crux of this argument and the part of it that

differs most greatly from other considerations of safe zones. *Humanitarian Intervention and Safety Zones: Iraq, Bosnia, and Rwanda* by Carol McQueen has, for example, been a valuable source for this paper. McQueen's own final conclusion, however, does not align with the conclusion reached through this research. She asserts that, "Safety zones seem more likely to succeed...if they are coherent in design; if they are implemented as a clear interim measure by a single state or multinational force with clear rules of engagement; if they are integrated into a broader conflict resolution approach; and if they are buttressed by a sufficiently strong state willingness to enforce them so as to ensure a credible deterrent threat against possible retributive measures."²⁸³ What McQueen does not recognize or acknowledge is that all of the aspects she notes for success in safe zone implementation before state willingness are *products* of state willingness. Without state willingness, none of the other aspects she marked as vital for a successful operation can be attained.

Her analysis of state willingness itself is also flawed; she argues that "[safe zones] let states do something to protect civilians targeted for slaughter, but let them simultaneously avoid becoming embroiled in the military conflict underway."²⁸⁴ McQueen's argument is confused. Protecting the civilians targeted for slaughter *is* becoming embroiled in the military conflict underway. An intervening force inherently has to protect civilians from slaughter *by another group*. Not recognizing this dynamic sews the seed for safe zone failure. Entering a conflict without the willingness to become involved in the conflict, and without the willingness to physically protect the vulnerable group from the belligerent, *will not* succeed in protecting the vulnerable group from the belligerent.

²⁸³ McQueen, *Intervention*, 161.

²⁸⁴ McQueen, *Intervention*, 151.

The tension between McQueen's conclusion and the conclusion of this paper illuminates the importance of having these discussions about safe zones. Well-informed and highly experienced individuals like Hillary Clinton call for safe zones, falling into the trap of thinking they are an easy fix for humanitarian crises. Or maybe some of those individuals calling for safe zones have a slightly more nuanced understanding of their history, perhaps they know about the massacre at Srebrenica, but they fall into McQueen's camp. These educated individuals assert that safe zones can be successful *if they are just done correctly*, and that their historical failures were all due to inadequate or flawed implementation. The reality of safe zones, however, is that the structure of interest and willingness that need to be in place for success is unlikely to ever be fulfilled by an actor pursuing humanitarian intervention.

The longer the international community remains ignorant to these facts or chooses to feign ignorance of these facts, the longer the most vulnerable individuals in conflict zones will be endangered by safe zone policy decisions. The case study of Syria makes this dynamic clear; instead of addressing the humanitarian crisis in Idlib, Turkey is attempting to institute a doomed safe zone purely in pursuit of domestic interests. The United States is playing into the plan to save face with the international community.

Ultimately, safe zones are an issue where a broader public understanding is easily achievable. While a broader public understanding is unlikely to change all of the problematic aspects of the international system that have allowed safe zones to be implemented for decades, making more individuals aware of the dangers of safe zones could create a culture of accountability where none currently exists. At the very least, increased public knowledge of these issues will pay witness to some of the ways in which the international community

has harmed vulnerable individuals in conflict zones. This outrage can push back against the notion of an international community more interested in the appearance of intervention than the actual humanitarian situation of civilians. Even in the face of inaction by the international community, this anger can be a testament to the many genuinely good people in the world who want to help those suffering the greatest.

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